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JOHN DANGERFIELD'S STORIES.

VOL. I.

a

THE
FOOL OF THE FAMILY;
AND OTHER TALES.

BY
JOHN DANGERFIELD,
AUTHOR OF "GRACE TOLMAR," ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES.
VOL. I.



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P R E F A C E.

THE stories contained in these two Volumes appeared originally in the *New Quarterly Magazine*. In putting them forward as new and original works of fiction it is right to explain that this phrase does not apply with quite strict exactness to the tale entitled, "Olivia Tempest." In this work I have endeavoured to reproduce certain phases of the society of the first half of the last century. To do so with any success, it was necessary to cast the whole story in a somewhat dramatic and, indeed, a somewhat artificial shape. At the period of my story play-going and play-reading had got to be the form in which literary culture chiefly reached the idle and so-called educated classes, and the circumstance had its effect upon social intercourse.

There got to be a strong theatrical flavour in the daily talk and daily life of men and women—an unconscious staginess—a rounding of sentences as if an audience were being addressed, a seeking after antithesis and a working up, as playwrights say, to “telling points.” Nor did the reflection of the theatre cease here: more than the mere manner of the stage was imitated; the situations, the plots, and the counter-plots, which proved so interesting behind the footlights, were sometimes intentionally reproduced and brought about in domestic and social life. That this period was a very artificial one we all allow; that life was exceedingly sprightly, and conversation very witty, is also quite as certain.

It is clear that in an attempt to hold the mirror up to this curious phase of life, some of the accepted canons in regard to fiction-writing must be infringed; for instance, in a story which is very nearly in the form of a comedy with a rather unusual proportion of asides and stage directions, perfect originality in regard to character and incident cannot be so strictly maintained as it should be in ordinary fiction. Playwrights care nothing for originality, hardly ever have made a point of it.

The limits of dramatic character and plot and incident are necessarily, owing to the exigences of dramatic representation, very narrow ; and if a good *dramatis persona* be once invented, he is too useful ever to be let die. So Sheridan has borrowed unreservedly from the great comic dramatists of the Restoration, they from Molière, Molière quite as freely from the Spaniards, and every one of them from Terence and Plautus.

Following such excellent examples, I had no hesitation when I set about to write a dramatic story, in borrowing—or rather, in adapting—one or two stock characters and one or two stock incidents. For instance, the character of Olivia is somewhat founded on the charming one of Millamant in Congreve's "Way of the World." The minor incident of the letter in my story is to be found in a play of Cibber's. The idea is an obvious and an old one, for it was common in dramatic writers some centuries before Cibber's time. So also the attack on the heroine is a stock incident. The disguise in the hero's name is, as every one knows, to be found in "The Rivals," but is likewise a circumstance in many scores of plays both before and after

Sheridan's time. So much for my plagiarisms, if they deserve the name. The plot, all the filling in, the dialogue and the jests—such as they are—are my own.

Everything else contained in these Volumes I claim to be absolutely of my own invention : a not wholly unnecessary declaration ; for a critic of a former novel of mine, on whose complete originality I had prided myself, told the world that I had borrowed my story from a work which I had never read, while a second reviewer maintained that it was taken from another work which I had never heard of,—both allegations being, as I afterwards ascertained, unsupported, even by the most accidental coincidence of style, plot, character, or incident.

JOHN DANGERFIELD.

CONTENTS OF VOL. I.



THE FOOL OF THE FAMILY.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. An Adventurer	1
II. The Streets of London	9
III. A Panic in Philistia	20
IV. Swans and Geese	28
V. A London Editor	33
VI. A Literary Hack	47
VII. The London World	59
VIII. A Dead Love	73
IX. Number Ninety-nine, Grafton Street	81
X. "Un philosophe regardant les astres se laissa choir dans un puits"	101
XI. The Way of the World	115
XII. A Friend in need	126
XIII. Mrs. Fontaine's Drawing-room Carpet	184
XIV. Utopia	145
XV. Fairyland	155

SPLENDIDE MENDAX.

I. A Sea Piece	173
II. The Minister of Northray	187
III. Miriam	192

X

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER	PAGE
IV. The Family at the Manse	197
V. Ruth's Promise	206
VI. The Northern Seas	216
VII. Ruth Ericssen's Ethics	222
VIII. Mr. Ericssen's Opinions	226
IX. Play-acting	233
X. The Perils of the Sea	240
XI. A Sea Change	263
XII. A New Comer	277
XIII. A False Woman	286
XIV. A Lost Love	293
XV. Time the Consoler	298
ON THE STAGE	309

THE FOOL OF THE FAMILY.

THE FOOL OF THE FAMILY.

CHAPTER I.

AN ADVENTURER.

FOR a man to find himself for the first time in the streets of London ; a stranger, with no home to make for, no friends to depend upon, unknown and unknowing, without resources, save the untried ones of his own wits, is surely among the most dreary of possible situations.

Add to these cheerless circumstances that the person about to embark the fortunes of his life should be of precisely that age when, being past the conceit of extreme youth, he has no reason for possessing the confidence of mature age, when he has achieved nothing, and when the realities of life are just begin-

ning to take the place of the fancies he has formed of them. Let the day of his arrival be true London weather, with its three constituents of mud, cold fog, and soot-charged rain-drip ; let every face he sees in the streets have the Londoner's hurried, care-possessed, distrustful expression ; let every house he looks up at stare back at him with the blank, forbidding, inhospitable aspect that no houses have elsewhere ; and the desolation of the situation is still further aggravated for him.

The person whom I have brought into this uncheerful position is Mr. Edward Wynter, and, though the principal character in this story, as little heroic an individual as can well be conceived. The son of a clergyman in the West of England, neither poor nor rich, neither particularly well nor very ill connected, Edward Wynter and his elder and only sister had succeeded, at his father's death, to an inheritance which the family solicitor had pedantically told him was nothing but a *damnosa hæreditas*. The Reverend James Wynter, his father, a widower, had spent the whole of a moderate income in maintaining his household and educating his children, and had made ample provision for

their future by an insurance upon his life. The office, however, failed a week before his death, and he died never knowing that they would be penniless. They were worse than beggars, indeed, for the insurance office was, as the term is, a mutual office, and their father's estate was liable. It therefore required all the scholarship which Edward Wynter had imbibed at the University not to give a free and expressive translation of the lawyer's phrase. To be left residuary legatee, while it procured him the ill-will of his brother-in-law, came to have no meaning for him but that certain *moneys*—so the solicitor called a few hundred pounds—the result of a sale by auction of everything left at the Rectory, were to be held by him until the creditors of the bankrupt office should make their claims upon it.

The clergyman's death had interrupted the young man's university career. At his father's desire and against his own likings, which were for desultory reading, he had tried to confine his work to the narrow channel which leads to University distinction. Another term would have completed his University career, but now he had to beg for assistance from rela-

tives or cut short his education. It was clearly a case in which a man should have claimed and got help from his kinsfolk; it was not pride that did not let him ask his uncle, Sir Robert Wynter, nor shyness, but something which stood between the two. He did not wish to be obliged to a man who had never shown any desire to befriend him, and he feared to be humiliated by first accepting help, and then, after all, missing a high degree.

The young man having grown through his boyhood with the conviction that he was cleverer, stronger, better looking, and altogether quite a superior being to any other boy in the world, had gradually come to the opposite opinion, not certainly without excellent reason for it, that he was signally the reverse of all this. To use the common phrase, all the nonsense had been knocked out of him. He saw that many of his fellows were ahead of him in school work, were stronger, quicker, and more enduring than him in the playing fields or on the river, were more ready-tongued, more thought of, more liked, more respected; in short, more successful in every way in the sphere of school and college life.

So discouraged had he been, that to evade the final examination for honours was, he had come to think, to escape certain failure and humiliation ; and yet the conceit was not all driven out of him even now. There was latent somewhere in him, in spite of all his disappointments, a belief in his own powers, an irrational kind of notion that, if he could fashion the world anew and let the new order of things be as he thought was most fitting, then he, under these changed conditions, could and would win his way to a high place. The world, however, he now began to perceive, was one in which he, with his unreadiness and indirectness, his want of confidence in himself, his incapacity to win sympathy, his mixture of shyness and effrontery which made him at one moment despised and at the next offensive, was altogether, he reflected, a world in which he was not destined to hold anything approaching to a high place : not that he was ambitious, or coveted distinction ; all he desired was to pass in the crowd—but then it must not be the crowd of fools—he wanted only to hold his own and to be free of the company of those whom he esteemed for their wits : a laudable enough ambition.

He was as yet, however, very far from having attained to his wish. "Poor Edward will never set the Thames on fire," he had once overheard his father say to a friend. His college tutor had in a friendly manner warned him not to set his hopes on more than a third-class degree. One day, when there had been a dinner-party at his married sister's house, and a young lady had sat between him and the curate of a neighbouring parish, the lady's conversation had been almost entirely with the clergyman—a gentleman for whose understanding Edward Wynter had no sort of respect—and his sister had good-naturedly repeated the grateful speech of her guest. "I was very well off indeed at dinner," she had said; "one of my neighbours so clever, and the other so handsome."

"Which of us is the fool?" said Edward Wynter; and his sister had severely replied, "Hush! Edward." This attack upon the cloth was, indeed, too utterly absurd to be listened to seriously.

If this anecdote might seem to imply that my hero was good looking, it implies what was not the case. If a young man is spoken of as good looking, it is generally only

a polite way of conveying the speaker's conviction that he is not very far from being a fool. If a man of Edward Wynter's age—twenty-one—has, as he had, fairly regular features, fairly well-opened grey eyes, a sallow but not a muddy complexion, and generally the look of a gentleman, it is quite enough to justify good-natured people, when speaking to his relations, and casting about for something not uncomplimentary, in calling him handsome. Appearances, indeed, were by no means against him. His figure was good, he neither slouched nor stooped, nor did he hold himself stiffly, like a recruiting sergeant. In walking he neither swaggered nor minced; he was above the middle height, and once he had unintentionally overheard the following compliment in a crowded room—"To judge by his face alone, one would think Edward Wynter quite clever!" and the person to whom this had been said had laughed.

So was the nonsense being completely taken out of the young man, and by the time he was of age he had arrived at the conclusion that if he still thought himself a genius, he was in a minority of one. Some people have confidence enough to set their judgment on such

a point against that of the crowd, but Edward Wynter had not. He bowed to the general opinion, and concluded that he, who would have to fight the battle of life by his wits, had none. There was, indeed, no help for it, and fight it he must, or starve. Only one merit can I, at this stage of his career, with any propriety bestow on my hero: he was persevering, he could plod on when things looked their worst. A brilliant fellow-undergraduate had once said of him, "How that fellow Wynter can go on pegging away with every chance against him, is more than I can understand!"

This is a very unromantic, unheroic quality indeed.

CHAPTER II.

THE STREETS OF LONDON.

EDWARD WYNTER was now leaving all this contempt and disesteem behind.

With ten pounds in his pocket, no possessions but a single box, in a hired London lodging,—the dingiest and dreariest of human habitations—under a dull, dripping sky, with the east wind sighing through the casement, with a sense of solitude enough to depress the god of cheerfulness himself, without friends or even books, with no face that did not look askance upon him as a possible cheat and probable beggar—with all these gloomy surroundings the young man had the unreason to feel positively cheerful. His spirits rose. The long-continued depression of unfavourable judgments was at last removed. He was beginning life for himself, unweighted by the

prejudices of those who had misinterpreted him. He must struggle now in earnest, with none to help him, but also with none to misjudge him. His courage revived like a soldier's who is woke by the clash of swords and the shouts of fighting men.

Most of the laziest and least hard-headed of us are fatalists to the extent of believing in luck. Edward Wynter was nothing of the kind; he over-disbelieved in good or bad luck. Good work and hard work would decide the fortunes of the day, he thought; he hoped nothing, and trusted absolutely not at all to any lucky chance. Hard work he could make sure of doing, and he began to believe, as once before he had believed, that he could do work that should have some value beyond that of being hard.

There was work, indeed, done in a large packet of manuscripts which he had thrown down on the table unopened—his handiwork; but he knew well enough that there was labour before him ere the world would receive its contents as any sort of an achievement. Fool as he had been accounted, he was not enough one to think the literary citadel was going to be taken by storm by the crude fancies of a

boy. He had guessed, what not every one of his experience has discovered, that authorship is a knack, a trade, a thing to be slowly learnt, an art, as much as painting a picture or forming a statue. What he had written on that paper he knew would have to be painfully remodelled, revised, recast, before it could become in any sense a work of art, a thing to hold the attention or stir the emotions. He did not despair of making it this.

It no doubt has a very softening influence upon a man, during his journey through life, that he should be able to recall a happy, softly-nurtured infancy and boyhood—caresses, flattery, encouragement, allowances for his shortcomings; but if the journey is to be a very uphill one, the path rocky and the breathing-places few, it may be doubted if it avails him much that he can look back on the green valley below, or recall experience of soft turf and flowers when he has to do with the barren upland peaks.

Edward Wynter, looking back, certainly distinguished no very smiling landscape in the past: a plodding school life, when toil as he would, he got no recompence for hard work; a dull home, with his father for only

companion, urging him to new exertions and always disappointed at his non-success; a college life where his poverty compelled him to keep aloof from the companions he liked, and mix with the few he could not sympathize with; and standing out from all this, the one short folly of his life, love for an ignoble woman, and his speedy disenchantment. He let the vision of this past love, still a sweet one to him, pass before him. His unaccountable infatuation he recalled with surprise; he recalled the rapid, passionate words in which he, not commonly over-ready in speech, had told the girl of his love; how she herself, cold and shallow as he now knew her to be, was for a moment stirred by his passionate pleading to some response of emotion. He recalled their rare meetings, her frequent hesitations, his slow-arising doubts of the nobility which at first he had clothed her with. Then his sudden announcement to her of his absolute poverty, her dismay, and the full revelation to him of her mercenary and despicable character: then the breaking off of their engagement by common consent.

These were the chief incidents of his life; and the future must be hard, indeed, if it

should afford nothing more agreeable to dwell upon.

Sufficiently clear will it by this time be to the reader that he is to extract none of the high flavour of romance out of the chief character and his surroundings in the present story. What does it, indeed, avail us, the men of this work-a-day nineteenth century, to regild the old ornaments of the poet and the romancer? Hard work to do, prejudices to overcome, injustice and scant sympathy to put up with, folly, fatigue and poverty to endure, sickness and old age to anticipate: these are the giants and dragons we have to slay, the perils and hardships of the way to encounter and to support, the enchantments to escape. We do not expect to conquer these modern monsters, nor to break the numbing spells that are laid on us in these days, but we have to bear the hardships of the journey quite as much as the knights of old had to do; only now-a-days we get no glory for it, we do not marry the king's daughter, or share half his kingdom. No poet sings our deeds, no fair hand crowns our brows. On the whole we have schooled ourselves to believe that we should feel very

uncomfortable if they did. Whatever other nations may feel in this matter of laurel wreaths, universal acclamation, and the trumpeting of fame, we Englishmen have got to despise these things; we do not set our faces the less resolutely to do our work, but we look to our reward—at least we are very wrong or very young if we do anything else—in the approval of our own consciences alone, as our morality books invite us to do.

In a great city like London there is work to do and bread to win for any man or woman whose hands and brains are no weaker than their neighbours'. Failing their being so, their owners must starve or live on charity. True it is, starvation is a matter of degree, and a man may be well clothed, fed, and housed, and yet suffer dire poverty if he have higher wants than for these things, as indeed, what man above a savage has not; and again, charity is a question of degree too? A man who owes place and pay to the favour of a patron or the prestige of his birth, who earns a single penny more than his work is worth, lives, to all intents and purposes, on charity, is a beggar unsuspecting it,—one who shall live all his life softly and sumptuously, shall

perhaps pity poorer men, dole out his own charities, preach patience to the needy, and be all the time an almsman himself as much as Lazarus who sits at his gate.

Edward Wynter had at certain times some vague idea that literary work was the work he would do best. He liked it, and he rightly guessed that what a man does lovingly he often does well; but then, where to begin? what to do after he had bought a ream of foolscap and a bottle of ink?

There was his uncle Sir Robert Wynter, a gentleman of considerable political influence, holding an important place under the Crown; moderately rich, hospitable, pompous, dictatorial, long-winded, not ill-natured. He lived somewhere in Belgrave Square. Should he present himself some morning after breakfast and have an interview with this comfortable and prosperous relative? He pictured the meeting. He brought before his fancy his portly uncle sitting by his library fire with a blue-book in his hand; an elderly, bald-headed, handsome gentleman, condescending and sententious and stilted from habit, and against his desire to be friendly and easy with his brother's son. He could imagine the

solemn lecture he would receive upon the avoidance of evil company, the necessity of economy, diligence, and so forth. His uncle would, he knew, offer to exert his influence to procure him an appointment in the Civil Service—a post which presented itself to him under the aspect of utter dependence combined with a seat at a desk, and eight hours a day of work that would be peculiarly distasteful to him. He would invite him to come to dinner on Sundays. Then the picture of his two tall, high-shouldered, red-haired cousins presented itself to him, and their stout, stupid, conventional mother,—of the ineffable dulness inseparable from any social gathering where his relations formed the chief part; and this apprehension, almost as much as his desire for absolute independence, determined him to avoid his uncle's house.

There was living somewhere in London a gentleman, accounts of whose somewhat Bohemian mode of life had reached him at home, and with whom he was already slightly acquainted. This was Mr. Aveling, the younger brother of Lord Aveling, a poor nobleman who lived in the parish of which

his father was rector. Mr. Aveling had done what Edward Wynter was now proposing to do. He had adventured himself in the field of literary work, and he had succeeded. He had got to be, rumour said, a far richer man than his brother, the peer; not, indeed, that a long purse was needed to count down guineas with his lordship, for that nobleman was the third in succession of an extravagant line, and his patrimony was a mean one.

Of Mr. Aveling's literary fame no one could say much; the world knew not his name; but in the field of letters a man may easily miss a reputation and gain a fortune. He was known in a way, to be sure, and well known, but it was to a limited circle. Editors, publishers, theatre managers, and all those who guide the great engines that work to supply our intellectual wants—all these men knew him and appreciated him. In Bohemia, a man has not for nothing the plodding and conscientious industry of a bank clerk, the wide knowledge and the literary tact of a man of the world and a scholar, joined to a capacity for every kind of intellectual labour. Such powers and such tastes are rare: they command a great price in a world where

power of all kinds is brought to a pecuniary assessment.

Edward Wynter had once confided to this gentleman his own intention of attempting a career of letters, and Mr. Aveling had endeavoured to dissuade him until he should have well convinced himself that he possessed an aptitude for literary life. He had, however, promised him advice and assistance should he ever come to London in pursuance of his intention; but the young man forbore from taking advantage of this promise, at least until he should have done something for himself. He would try to win his spurs without help, and would appeal unrecommended to those who knew him not.

So he cast himself friendless into the sea of letters, scattering paragraphs for newspapers, letters to editors, articles for magazines, but all to no purpose. The great stumbling-block in the way of literary success, after the too common one of incapacity, is indifference on the part of editors and publishers. The labourers are too many for any one unfriended individual, not recommended by antecedents of success, to be hired. Once or twice, indeed, he received an answer inquiring

what he had published or written before ; he had to answer, "Nothing," and he heard no more.

His resources were getting low : in a week he would be at the bottom of his purse, and he got uneasy. His chosen career had seemed so little difficult from a distance, the strongholds so assailable ; and now he was face to face with the fact, that for the best work he could do there was not the smallest demand whatever.

CHAPTER III.

A PANIC IN PHILISTIA.

It was the dull season. Parliament had been up two months. There was not that stir in the political, literary, and artistic world which precedes Christmas; and yet the souls of men were vexed within them. There was an upheaval of some latent grievance against some one of our great time-honoured institutions; some cause for apprehension was suddenly, by an accidental lucidity of some exponent of it, brought to the comprehension of the masses; some old exploded problem was for the moment revived, some dilemma long since evoked and laid at rest was again brought to the light. It matters not to the interest of this story what was the particular cause for alarm or indignation; whether we had suddenly awoke to the conviction that our naval

supremacy was slipping away, the French or the Germans coming to invade us, or our food systematically poisoned, and every one of us dying slowly of occult symptoms. It was one of our periodical panics, and it was this time a serious one; and coming in November, it was no small cause of rejoicing to newspaper men.

When the great *apoplectic* class has begun to stir itself in any matter, something is likely to come of it; when groups of red-faced men get together in clubs and in drawing-rooms, at Tattersall's, in City streets, and on Exchanges, and appear to be literally bursting with some grievance; when the neckties of stout gentlemen in first-class railway carriages perceptibly tighten, as they read "apoplectic" leading articles in the daily papers, then let the world be prepared—some great change is imminent in this England of ours.

In this particular case the grievance was real; the indignation, though excessive, not quite unfounded. The matter was a somewhat abstruse one. One weekly newspaper of standing had expressed itself strongly on one side; other leaders of opinion, afraid to venture a judgment where they knew they were ill-informed, had been less bold or more modest. A

point of international law was involved, and it so happened that international law, lying, as it did, rather outside his routine University studies, was yet a subject which had interested Edward Wynter; he had plunged, or rather dipped, into the subject when he should have been busy with Greek particles or Aristotle's ethics. He knew, of course, as little as possible about the matter, but it chanced that his promiscuous reading had caused him to stumble upon the very point now in dispute: he knew, at least, where to go for information, and precedent, and argument; and this, if report says true, is all that many men learned in the law ever do know.

It was a critical moment; the great lawyers had not spoken; none but the too dogmatic weekly journal in question had hazarded a trenchant opinion. It was a wrong opinion, and Edward Wynter saw that it was wrong. He was young and enthusiastic; he fell in with the prevailing sentiment, and he sat down and composed a leading article in the style of a respectable, well-written, and not very leading daily journal, which he was in the habit of seeing every day at the tavern where he dined and breakfasted. He had felt

strongly, and he wrote strongly. He had supported his own impression of the matter by reference to the authorities; he quoted them. The matter seemed clear enough in his eyes. He put aside the immaterial points crowded round the main issue by the weekly journal; he stated it simply, he drew his conclusion with moderation, and, when he had done with the reasoning of the case, he let his indignation have full play, and denounced the opinions of his adversary with courage and emphasis.

Every one who has tried it knows that writing leading articles is an easy thing enough; it only requires that a man should understand his subject thoroughly, should not use long sentences or long words, or pedantic ones; should have some wit, some sense of humour, a fair share of common sense, and rather more than a fair share of tact. If he writes for gentlemen and men of the world, it is, of course, necessary that he should be acquainted with their sentiments, and should express himself with their locutions. Granting all this, it is the very easiest thing in the world to write a leading article. Whether my hero possessed all these qualifications is more

than I can pretend to say. I only know that he wrote a very good article.

He went to breakfast rather earlier than usual the next morning. The paper was engaged : an old gentleman sitting opposite to him let his tea cool while he read it. He was presently joined by another person ; both were *habitués* of the place, and both, as he knew, solicitors from the neighbouring Gray's Inn, old-fashioned enough to take their breakfast at a tavern.

"The *** has hit the right nail on the head at last," said the first gentleman.

"Humph!" said the second gentleman, who had not read his newspaper.

"Can it possibly be my article?" thought Edward Wynter; but he had been disappointed too often to hope not to be this time.

"Their line is," said the lawyer, "that——" and he stated the argument that Edward Wynter had used.

"He has anticipated me, or borrowed my argument," thought the young man.

The lawyer read a sentence out, and it was his own article word for word.

"By Jove!" exclaimed my hero, starting up.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said the old gentleman, who had not sat opposite the young man at breakfast for the last month without being on speaking terms with him, "you said——"

"I said 'By Jove!'" said Edward Wynter, "and I have got to fetch something;" and he took up his hat, leaving his breakfast untasted, to the speechless astonishment of the waiters.

Through Temple Bar down the Strand he walked rapidly, looking on the right and left for a newsagent's shop. Many newsboys assailed him with offers of every daily paper in the metropolis except the one he wanted. When he asked for a copy they shook their heads and said, "All sold." He reached the Adelphi Theatre nearly before he found what he wanted—a little shop hung all over with newspapers. On the table was lying a pile of—let us call it—the *London Mail*. He put down the price on the counter and seized a copy. His own article was the first leader—in large, conspicuous print, not a single addition, not an alteration—exactly as he had written it. He read it through in the shop, with customers coming in and out and crowding him. If any one had spoken to him he

would hardly have heard, so rapt was his attention. It is not for nothing that a man has knocked for so long at the door of honest employment, and got no answer; it is not for nothing that a man's last sovereign has been changed; it is not for nothing that he has actually looked poverty—the stern-featured—in the face, or even that he has seen his own writing in print for the first time, when he knows that his doing so means work and means independence.

He went back to his lodgings, and for the first time the dingy streets seemed cheerful, the soot-charged east wind invigorating, and the leaden skies and London mud not uncheerful accessories. So it was, I would warrant, with the victorious Roman, when he passed along the ways of Rome on the triumphal car, that the streets were not the same streets to him as when he had been jostled along them, a plain Roman citizen. Edward Wynter's hansom cab was a car of triumph to him that day, and the grim houses relaxed their frown upon him. He had touched the magic spring now, learned the spell, got the password, and grasped the fairy wand. The wilderness that he was passing through—this

terribly dreary, inexpugnable London had been a wilderness to him—broke into the semblance of a garden, the flowers blossomed out, the waters sprang up, the sun burst through the clouds, the birds sang. He had a purpose and a future; he, too, could do some real work in the world.

He drove to his lodgings and asked for a letter. A gentleman had called to see him, and had left his card. It was the editor of the *London Mail*.

CHAPTER IV.

SWANS AND GEESE.

THE writer of this plain story, in which the reader has been warned to expect neither romance nor any flavour whatever of poetry, has all his life long been a timid respecter of the conventionalities. If a hundred worthy people tell him that a thing is white, and he is conscious that it is black, it is to him nevertheless, to all intents and purposes, white. Who is he, or who is any one for that matter, that he should step out of the ranks and break the beautifully symmetrical array of that disciplined army which we call society? A pretty pass, indeed, things would come to if Private Jones should think it incumbent upon him to question his general's word of command!

So it has been that as his hero had been set

down for a fool by the common consent of all who knew him best, it was not for the author to assert to the contrary, but rather to do his utmost to support and fortify the general opinion. Now, however, this party had got to be in a minority, inasmuch at least as the praise of the anonymous writer of the article in the *London Mail* was loud and universal; and the author, not departing from his professed agreement with the majority, now goes over to their side. His hero is no fool, and he knew it all along, and so might the reader have guessed if he had chosen to penetrate the thin and clumsy irony with which the author endeavoured to explain away his feat of achieving a telling leading article. An easy thing indeed! Ask those that have tried.

The middle of a story is not quite the place to ask and answer the question how it is and why it is that a man's own circle come so often to agree that he is a Solon when he is none, or an idiot when he is wiser than any of them. What terrible mistakes we do make in this matter, to be sure! Is there a family in the land where the genius has not grown up into a very poor creature—whose cygnet has

put on no swan's plumage as he swam down the stream of years? If the despised fool has not as often developed into a genius, it is that geniuses are rare birds that do not roost on every perch.

If we were quite wise ourselves, of course we should make these mistakes less often; but are they not almost impossible to avoid? How can we look on a bright child, quick in thought, ready in speech, and full of childish wit and fun, and refrain from doing the little rule of three sum about it. If the child of eight is so clever, what will the man of thirty not be? Or again, how can we guess that the dull, thick-witted child, sleepy and listless, who has never a gleam of the other's wit, who has none of the charm and brightness of the other, dull in perception and slow in speech, how can we guess that he is a genius in disguise? How can we tell that the quick early growth of the one will be arrested, that his wit will crystallize into flippancy, and his cleverness into disputatious dogmatism—that the future Lord Chancellor will make a briefless barrister, the future bishop a croquet-playing curate, the general a half-pay captain, and so forth—and what is to make us guess

that the heaviness and cloudiness of the other is but the ferment of great mental powers, the mysterious development of a grand intellect?

Of such a type of childhood had been Edward Wynter's. There was indeed plenty in him, if any one had had the wit to perceive it. Some clever children want repression, but more, I think, want encouragement. Is it not quite as possible that the latent germs of what would grow into real genius may sometimes be absolutely stifled and suppressed by discouragement, as for a too forward mental development to be over-stimulated by the opposite treatment? I fully believe it.

With Edward Wynter, however, it was, perhaps, as well that he was let alone. He possessed the strong moral fibre that could bear up against the absence of the sympathy that he craved, and such a man is none the worse for being thrown on his own resources. His was a mind and a character that gain by not being trained to lean on others, as indeed many of us would gain by this stern process. It was needful for him to explore and assess the resources of his mind before coming to the encounter with the great world.

Some men are workers, some thinkers, and

some dreamers. It is rare enough a thing if either of these three sorts of men achieve much in the world. The mere worker is a drudge, the mere thinker an idler, and the visionary, purposeless ; but the man who is a dreamer, and can think out his vision—a thinker, and can work out his thoughts, becomes, if he cares to, a leader of men—is of the salt of the earth.

The eventual career of such men is usually a matter of ambition, and ambition a matter of temperament. There are men who, having power over men, have everything ; there are others, and my hero was one of them, who would not stir a finger to rule a nation. What he had wanted was to achieve that which should bring him into fellowship with those whom he accounted his equals in taste and intelligence, and this object he was now in a fair way of attaining.

CHAPTER V.

A LONDON EDITOR.

It was a question with him whether he should respond to the invitation of the editor of the *London Mail* to call upon him at the office of the newspaper, or whether he should avoid a personal interview and communicate by letter. Should he let the editor see the actual Edward Wynter, who had never made a good impression upon any one yet, or should he let himself interpose the medium of a letter, and keep his bodily presentment in the background? He resolved on the bolder alternative. His old boyish confidence in himself was reviving; he knew he had done a good stroke of work, and that he could do many more; and, after all, what had his youth, or his shyness, if he was shy, or his manners, if they were not conciliating—what had these

things to do with his ability to serve the *London Mail*? And he was right. London editors are used to queer exteriors; our best literary work is often the work of men and women who look very little capable of it, and the last evidence a man in search of such work looks to is the evidence of face, bearing, or conversation. Take comfort, ladies and gentlemen of genius, if you exist anywhere, and do not be afraid of your unconquerable habit of blushing or stammering. You are permitted, if you only possess the divine spark, to wear very queer clothes, and even to put your h's in the wrong place, and to mangle our Queen's English in your talk, provided only you do not do it in your writing!

So Edward Wynter went to the office of the newspaper in Fleet Street, where such offices mostly are, up a narrow court-yard, through a dirty-looking entry. He saw "Editorial Department" written over a door which stood ajar; pushing it open, he found himself in a passage, along which a boy in inky clothes, with an inky face, and very inky hands, was sauntering.

"I want to see the editor," said the young man.

The boy winked, said nothing, and passed on.

"I want to speak to the editor," he said to a man with a bundle of papers, nearly as inky, further down the passage. The man jerked his thumb over his shoulder for answer, and went on his way.

Edward Wynter followed in the indicated direction, came to a door, and opened it. A large, low room contained about forty men in their shirt-sleeves—compositors—busy arranging their types. He turned back; several messengers, boys and men, passed him; no one asked him his business, or even looked at him. He walked along another passage, came to a door marked "Waiting Room," and went in. Half a dozen people were already there. A boy followed him, and shouted, "Mr. Marcus!" and the person who answered to that name—a small, Jewish-looking gentleman, with a large note-book chained to his pocket—started from his seat, and walked quickly to the door.

Edward Wynter took a chair and sat down. No one spoke. Every one in the room stared at him for an instant, and he stared curiously at them all. Each of them had a bundle of

papers or a note-book in his hand, and every one of them leaned on a stout cotton umbrella. Three of the party were men, two ladies. A tall man with a red face, a very stout man with a red face, a third man of a shadowy presence, who kept in the background, away from the window, in the darkest corner of the room, and, planting his umbrella between his knees, as all the others did, seemed to be lost in contemplation of its knob. Edward Wynter saw that he ought to have brought an umbrella; he had come among them as a man unarmed.

One of the ladies was more remarkable for development of brow, and from having parted her hair very much on one side, than for any particular charm of face or figure. The other was a young girl in a shabby black dress, who instantly attracted his attention; for not only did she, like all the others, carry a formidable cotton umbrella, but she wore very unmistakable black cotton gloves, very long in the fingers. The other lady was of the strong-minded class who despise gloves, and whose hands are bony. This was intelligible to Mr. Wynter, but not the cotton gloves of the younger lady. "If gloves at all, why not

kid?" he argued to himself in the dearth of more urgent matter for reflection.

The messenger came in again and again, and each time called out a name, and each time one of the party got up and followed him out of the room, till at length Edward Wynter and the young person with cotton gloves were left together. He had determined to wait his turn, and also to accost the last person left.

"Are you waiting to see the editor?" he asked.

"No," answered the young lady with cotton gloves, "the sub-editor."

"And all these persons with—with umbrellas," said the young man, who, for the moment, could think of nothing more distinctive about them, "pray, who are they?"

"That lady," she said, "is the light literature reviewer. She does the novels, you know, and the minor poets. The tall man is in the police-court reporting department; the stout person, with the red face, is a theatrical critic, and sometimes does a coroner's inquest; and the thin gentleman, who sat in the corner, is fires, murders, and sudden deaths."

The young lady, who was a very young lady

indeed, not more than fifteen or sixteen, with a very pale, thin face, not in the least pretty, was so perfectly serious and matter-of-fact in her conversation, that Edward Wynter neither laughed nor looked astonished.

"What is your own business on the paper?" he asked her.

"We—that is, my mother and I—do the public concert critiques," and she extricated a roll of manuscript somewhere from the inside of her cotton umbrella, and showed it to him. Then, after a pause, and looking at the young man: "Are you on the paper—no?"

"Not exactly," said he; "I want to be."

"Ah!" said the young lady, discreetly.

But Mr. Wynter, though not given to confidences, had got too much out of his companion not to tell her about himself in return.

"I have written one article, and I want to be regularly employed."

"A leading article?"

"Yes, about——;" he mentioned the subject of his article of that morning.

"You wrote that article!" she said, with sudden interest. "I wish I had."

"Why?" he asked.

"Because then my fortune would be made."

"Miss Champernowne," called the boy, and she got up and, with a nod to him, went out.

"What a fine name for so quiet a little person!" he reflected. "A very queer girl," he said to himself, "not pretty; indeed, as nearly plain as any one can be with good eyes and without crooked features. Decidedly intelligent, but very odd." When he asked himself in what her oddness consisted, he was puzzled, till he recollected that she differed from any young lady he had yet encountered, in being perfectly natural, calm, and self-possessed; in having no particle of shyness, and in not having once taken refuge in the pretty little vapid, simpering laugh, characteristic of her age and sex. In this, and only in this, did her queerness consist.

There is no reticence like that of an editor. The reticence of a diplomate or a detective is as nothing to it. When, however, it is established that a certain calling in life is marked by excessive avoidance of confidence, a great man can take advantage of the fact to impose on his fellow-creatures. So, it is related, did Talleyrand aggravate his reputation for

crooked ways by doing the very last thing his acquaintances thought him capable of—by telling the truth habitually; doing this great violence to his conscience and his own code of morality, not to conciliate right-thinking men, but in the certain belief that his truthfulness was but a newer and more ingenious way of deceiving his fellow-men.

Mr. Bryant, the editor of the *London Mail*, followed in the steps of the great French diplomatist so far as that he employed a frankness unused of editors; and as it sets wise people thinking, and doubting, and shaking their heads if any one in this conventional world of ours departs one step from his profession, so it never occurred to the acquaintances of Mr. Bryant to suppose that his frankness was genuine, or that he was not treating them with a diplomatic duplicity; whereas he all the time rode his curious hobby of truth-telling with all the simplicity in the world.

"Sit down, Mr. Wynter," said the editor cheerfully. He was a man of forty, in a grey shooting coat; not somehow at all a literary looking person. One could have imagined him, so dressed, and with that cheerful look-

ing face and fresh complexion, standing by a game covert, walking through a turnip field with a brace of pointers, driving a four-in-hand, watching his farm machines at work, or doing any one of the twenty different things that come natural to a country-bred and country-loving English gentleman—anything but sitting in an office littered with books of every shape and size, and lumbered in every corner with files of newspapers, half a dozen speaking tubes within reach of his left hand, as many spring bells near his right, and a great square table so loaded with heaps of manuscripts and printed sheets, that it had shed a goodly portion of its burden on the floor around.

“Sit down, Mr. Wynter,” said the cheerful genius of this spot—the pole round which all the prodigious activity of agents, messengers, printers, reporters, critics, sub-editors and contributors revolved; the sun of this small world, upon which if he failed to do his daily illumination, as complete an eclipse would occur, as in the case of the great luminary not condescending to shine upon the greater world.

“I had been very impatient to see you,”

said Mr. Bryant, as our hero sat down in an armchair at the editor's right hand. "That was a remarkable article you sent me, Mr. Wynter; I had been puzzling to think whether you were an old lawyer who wanted to set us right in the law, or a rising Member of Parliament who wrote it to show up the government, or a University Professor who had been reading up International Law. I had moved heaven and earth to find out who and what you were, and I only knew five minutes before you came in."

No man penetrates into a region pervaded by red sealing-wax and tape, and officialism generally, without expecting some effort to be made to impress him with the dignity of the presiding divinity of the spot. Edward Wynter had of course anticipated that the editor would act up to the established editorial *rôle* of omniscience and inscrutability. This undignified admission of curiosity was a weak surrender of his position; so he looked disappointedly into Mr. Bryant's face, as a spectator looks at an actor whose acting falls short of the expectation he had raised.

"I am afraid you are disappointed when you see what I am," said the young man.

"On the contrary," said the editor, "I never was better pleased. What good help could I get from a lawyer up to his ears in work, if he was worth anything at all—or from an M.P. with his head running on party intrigues, or an Oxford or Cambridge Professor—a mule-headed doctrinaire perhaps, or a common-room man and nothing else—whereas you are young at least, and can have had no time to let your ideas freeze into icicles! We shall be able to mould your mind to the grand principles of the *London Mail*."

"What are they?" said Edward Wynter.

"Why, your own, I believe," said the editor, "so far as I can judge from your article. To carry expediency as far as we can with honour; not to bore our readers; to write clear English; not to use long words, or catch words, or grand phrases which mean nothing; to be neither sentimental nor sensational; not to laugh at established prejudices, if they are harmless; to write up no line of conduct for the nation that a right-minded English gentleman would not carry out, if the circumstances allowed, in his own household; to be just and logical with every one and in regard to everything, so far as honesty and honour will let us."

"Your principles amount, simply, to pure Toryism."

"They have that drawback," said the editor, with a grave irony.

"And the *London Mail* has the character of being almost Radical; at least ultra-Liberal!"

"Such is the gross stupidity of the world that our Conservatism is so interpreted," and the editor laughed; "I can't help that."

"I am afraid I am not Tory enough for you," said Edward Wynter, and he laughed too.

"Do you agree to all I laid down?"

"To every word of it."

"Then you will do for us," said the editor.

"What can I do for you?"

"You can write for us. You can write two, three, or four articles a week for us. If you want an easy profession, let me tell you it is not a bad one. We shall pay you, as we do to every one, five pounds an article; if you write four a week, it is over a thousand a year; what better paid work than that? Do you accept?"

"Certainly I do; but if I break down—if my articles are not worth five pounds apiece?"

"I should reject them; but I am sure there is no fear of that happening often. We make it a rule," said the editor, "to meet here every day—when I say *we*, I mean we leading article writers; we hold a sort of daily council in this room every morning, and settle what each of us shall write about, and, more or less, what we shall say. Then you can go home and write your article, or have a room to yourself here."

So it was settled without further discussion that Edward Wynter was to write leading articles for the *London Mail*.

"And now," said the editor, as they were about to part, "if there is anything else I can tell you, pray ask me. You must know I make no secret of anything."

"One thing has puzzled me, I admit. You said you had learnt all about me before I came in; now, pray, how did you do that?"

"Easy enough. Through Mr. Aveling; he knows every one and every thing, so I telegraphed, 'Do you know Edward Wynter? he wrote our first leader of to-day,' and here is the answer," said the editor, holding up a telegram: "'Very well. Nephew of Sir Robert Wynter. Very young. Engage him if you

can.' Which, you will observe, is what I have done; going partly by his advice, which is always good, partly by what I saw of you, and chiefly, of course, by your article."

And with this explanation Edward Wynter departed, admiring the editor's original habit of telling the truth and the whole truth, and thinking how immensely—morality apart—it must simplify business, and concluding that after all, half the lies—at least, half the white lies—come from cowardice and laziness, and most of the other half from stupidity.

CHAPTER VI.

A LITERARY HACK.

WHAT reminiscences the title of this chapter recalls of poor authors or Grub Street poets, dunned by the milk-woman, writing in their shirt-sleeves because their coats were at the pawnbroker's; of the old jokes made by the prosperous wits of the last centuries about starving authors, hunted by duns and in danger of the Fleet Prison, and inexorable publishers!

These cruel old jests could not be made now. The Goldsmiths and the Johnsons would run no danger of starvation in these days. Grub Street is a thing of the past. The vineyard has increased faster than the labourers worthy of hire. Let a man but have the scholarship, the versatility, and the industry of these men, with ever so little a flavour of their genius,

and he will find hack literature at the present day a paying profession—a lucrative, an independent, and an honourable profession.

So Mr. Aveling found it, into whose rooms in the Temple Edward Wynter made his way after leaving the editor's presence. He had not yet called upon his acquaintance, and he had held back for the reason that now did not exist. He did not now come as a beggar, but to thank him for a great service rendered.

In all the vast extent of London, from Stratford-le-Bow in the east to the gloomy deserts of South Kensington and Brompton in the far west, from the remote Sahara of Islington and the imperfectly explored hill country of Highgate and Hampstead in the north to far off Southwark and Lambeth in the south—in all this great continent of human habitations there is surely no pleasanter dwelling-place for a rational being who hates noise and crowded ways, and alternations of dust and mud, and stucco and architectural shams, and ugliness generally, and who loves to sleep and to eat, to read, to write, and to talk, away from the din of rolling wheels and the shouts of hoarse costermongers, the whistling and musical howling of street boys, and the worse

music of street organs—for the person with these not uncommon susceptibilities to the agreeable and the disagreeable, there is no such fitting home as among the peaceful courts of the Temple.

To the countryman or the foreigner, bewildered by the incessant movement and din of London life, it is a curious sensation to pass at a single step from the great thoroughfare, where this stir and confusion are at their greatest, into the noiseless precincts of the Temple.

By what a happy concatenation of chances it is that this spot has got, through the many strange vicissitudes of its history, to be warded off from the intrusion alike of commerce and of fashion, and to have come at last to be consecrated to sober learning and the Muse of Law—to have become the Hippocrene and Aganippe of modern London, sacred to Thelxinoë, the Mind-Soother, and to Meleté, Goddess of Meditation! (Thus can a man's enthusiasm tempt him to the airing of his classical learning!) The Temple is, classicism apart, a charming retreat for studious men, with its paved lanes and courts, with here and there the splash of a tiny fountain, with its

ancient churches and halls, its green trees, its broad turfy lawns, and its tall brick houses—not stuccoed with imitation of stone or porticoed like Greek temples, but real, unmistakable, simple old houses of honest brick-work, that look meant for unpretending men to live in.

In this calm retreat, where no omnibus can get admittance, where no street cries are heard, where no street organ grinds out its dismal music, and no street boy dare to whistle, where the silvery laugh of lovely woman herself even is never echoed by the walls and pavements—in this calm retreat dwelt Mr. Aveling, in a house looking on to the very quietest court in the Inner Temple, within thirty yards of Fleet Street, and in a silence as complete as if his dwelling were among the green lanes of Devonshire or Somersetshire.

Edward Wynter read the name of the Honourable George Aveling, inscribed, along with those of a dozen other gentlemen, in black letters on the lintel of the door. This inscription told him that his acquaintance had his dwelling on the ground floor, and he presently found himself at a door also with his name

written on it. He knocked. A servant in black—a man with a gliding walk and urbane manner—opened it immediately and asked for his name. He gave it. The man returned, and reflecting in his voice the cordiality of his master, begged him to come in.

Mr. Aveling's room was in singular contrast to the room of the editor of the *London Mail*. In that plain apartment the very genius of business had seemed to be present. Not a picture or print, or ornament of any kind, was to be seen, and floor, chairs, and tables were alike littered with books and papers. Here order reigned everywhere: a model literary man's room, worth more careful consideration than Edward Wynter could give it at the moment. A large and lofty room, with heavy gilt cornice, a dark red paper, and the walls covered as high as the eye could comfortably reach with engravings in black frames. Tall ebony bookshelves reared themselves against each wall, and a little carpeted staircase led to a light railed gallery running midway between floor and ceiling, from which the upper shelves could be comfortably reached. A huge blue and grey earthenware stove, with a rich encrusted antique design, stood nearly

in the centre of the room, and diffused a pleasant warmth. Through the window, which opened into a conservatory, the scent of flowers in full bloom was wafted into the room.

His elder brother, Lord Aveling, had once thought fit to laugh at his brother for having a lot of what he called "trumpery prints, and you such a Cræsus! My dear George, what a fellow you are," would his Lordship say, sauntering up to the wall, "why, here are four of your prints exactly the same! Look here, this thing of a man in a turban, on horse-back, with a crowd round him of the most hideous men and women I ever saw: here are two, three, four, all alike! What a maniac you are! What a heaven-abandoned thing it is! I say, George, what does it all mean? It's lucky for you you're a genius, you know. If I did a thing like that, you and the others would lock me up, wouldn't you, now? Eh?"

"Upon my word," said his brother, "I don't know that we are justified in waiting till you do!"

"What a jolly lunatic he is!" mused his Lordship, with his glass in his eye, good-humouredly continuing to inspect more of the "trumpery prints," and coming back to the

turbaned gentleman on horseback. "I say, George, upon my word this is too bad! For a man like you, who does know what a horse ought to be, to have such a thing as this in your room! Just look at the line of his quarter and hock, and the fellow isn't ashamed of putting his name to it—R E M—why, *Rembrandt*! I have heard of him before somewhere."

"I should rather hope you had!" said the younger brother with ineffable scorn.

"Who was he, after all?" said the unabashed peer.

"Look here, William, I am a busy man, and this is an education you are asking for. Go down to your club, go down to Doodle's, and take down the English Encyclopædia, or Pinnock's Catechism, or Mangnall's Questions, or any book not above your capacity, and look out *Rembrandt*, and for heaven's sake get to know, or pretend to know, his "*Triumph of Mordecai*" when you see it, and don't wonder at a man's having four *states* of it. If this story got about, they'd laugh at you even at Doodle's. By Jove, sir, they'd laugh at you in the House of Lords itself!"

When Mr. Aveling called his brother *sir*, it

was a sign he was nearly past all patience with him, so the good-natured, easy-going nobleman got up to go, laughing at the lecture he had got from the brother who wrote his speeches for him and sometimes lent him money; went to Doodle's, *read up* the great engraver in the Encyclopædia, and talked so learnedly that evening at dinner of *first states* and *burr* and *velouté* that he impressed the whole party, and bewildered Lady Aveling herself.

Mr. Aveling was a tall, thin man of between fifty and sixty, but with perfectly white hair, wearing neither moustache nor whiskers, dressed in simple black and grey clothes with the care and simplicity common to ninety-nine out of a hundred English gentlemen. A man with the thin, pale face, and the keen, astute expression popularly (and quite erroneously) ascribed to Jesuits; a man who, under a calm reticent manner, suppressed a strong nervous energy not uncommon in Englishmen of the more intellectual type: one who had lived all his life in the very centre of the mental activity of this great city, and was himself no mean actor in the great London comedy, whose pleasure was to know every

move on the board, the working of every secret spring of ambition and vanity; and who, having no spark of either quality, was by so much the more a power himself.

If there was to be a war, he knew who the General was who *should* be sent out and who *would* be sent; if there was a vacancy in the Cabinet, he knew both who ought to and who would fill it; if there was a new book, he knew why one critic would praise it and why another would condemn it; if a new play was announced, he knew how the two chief actors had quarrelled with each other, and the author spoiled his dialogue to reconcile their differences. He knew why it was that some second and third-rate statesmen, authors, and artists are always praised, some good ones mercilessly abused, and some never mentioned at all.

Mr. Aveling was a just man, and not a malicious one; and it was fortunate for the world of letters that it was so, for his keen wit and ready pen would have made him a reviewer terribly to be feared by authors, but he was strongly impressed with the responsibility of his vocation. "There must be critics, from whom there is no appeal, for the

world is too busy to read everything itself, and the critics must, as a rule, be less learned and less clever than the best among the men whose works they sentence, else why should they be critics! But the less genius the more need of caution." And he would quote old Fuller, "Let him take heed how he strikes that hath a dead hand." Mr. Aveling had borne among critics a great and singular reputation; *he had never been known to praise a friend's work in print, nor to run down an enemy's!*

He received his young friend very cordially. "So," he said, "you wrote this morning's leader in the *Mail*? I thought it was in you, but I did not think it would come out so soon. A man who can do that can do anything. A hundred times better have done that than write the play or the novel of the season."

Edward Wynter, at his request, gave him an account of his adventures, or rather his struggles and his long succession of failures, and Mr. Aveling listened to him with interest, and heard with approbation his reason for not having come to him sooner.

"And your pride did you a good turn there," he said, "for, had you come to me, I could

probably have got you work at once, but I should only have put your foot on the lowest rung of the literary ladder for you to work your way up; and, let me tell you, it is a ladder with an extraordinary deal of climbing to be done, as a rule, before a man is as high up as you are already. I speak from experience; I have had my own foot on every rung of the ladder."

"I have had good luck at starting," said the young man.

"My dear fellow, don't talk of good luck! There is bad luck, certainly, such as being a younger son, or marrying a woman with a temper; but, believe me, whose hair is white, there is no such thing as good luck. As a rule, a man fails because he is a fool, and wins because he is not. That is my philosophy; a little stock of good sense to begin with, and plenty of hard work, that must win the day. You have deserved success, and you have gained it; you held a good hand, and that has won you the trick; and you have now a good game before you if you know how to play it. There I think I can help you, and if you will take my advice, you shall have it."

"I came here," said Edward Wynter, "chiefly for that very purpose."

Mr. Aveling rang the bell, and said to his servant, a pale reflection of himself in dress, in figure, and even in face—

“Sherry and cigars, James, and I am not at home to any one. If any one wants to wait to see me don’t let him; ask him to write his business on his card.”

“One of the bores in life which James and I are always fighting against,” he said, when his servant was gone, “are the people who want to see one on business. Nothing takes the vitality out of a man so much as interviews. With ninety-nine people out of a hundred who come to see me, six words from them, and yes or no from me, is all that needs to pass; and yet such people will keep me from my work for whole valuable five minutes together.”

CHAPTER VII.

THE LONDON WORLD.

IN spite of Mr. Aveling's denunciation of good luck, it was clear to Edward Wynter that it was a very unmistakable piece of good fortune for him to have encountered so useful a guide to the great world of London life as he stood on its very threshold. In his profession of journalist, it was absolutely essential that he should be free of that company of men of business and men of pleasure, artists and amateurs, authors and critics, savants, and fashionable people, statesmen and politicians, who go to make up the great social London Parliament, which represents every section of the national life, which meets in April and dissolves in August, and of which the Parliament in Westminster is often but the mouthpiece. A philosopher may keep to his study, a savant to his

laboratory or his cabinet, an artist to his studio, a merchant to his desk, and a scholar to his books; but a man who every day of his life addresses the great English public must mix with it day by day, and know it in all its moods and phases of thought. The public is his patient, and he cannot prescribe unless he actually have his fingers on its pulse.

Good society in London is by no means impenetrable to those who are recommended in almost any way. It is always wanting to be amused, interested, excited; it objects, indeed, to ostentation or vulgarity, unless these qualities are relieved by good birth. It has a necessary sympathy with commonplace and mediocrity, because no small share of these ingredients goes to its own constitution; but it is fairly tolerant, it welcomes talent, and likes rising authors, artists, travellers, generals, even successful missionaries, if they will only learn the few necessary passwords, and conform to its ways.

It accepted Edward Wynter at once. On Mr. Aveling's recommendation, it would have accepted any young man of presentable looks, dress, and bearing; but the cordiality of his reception was, of course, greatly enhanced by

the knowledge of his sudden literary success—a success of a sort which particularly appeals to a society where any success connected with politics is peculiarly appreciated. Moreover, while the young man had all the assurance of precocity, he had none of its impertinence or pretentiousness; and assurance not so accompanied is rare enough to pass for actual modesty, and makes no enemies.

His success had made him a new being; he had quite dropped the old reticence, which had had a very strong resemblance to shyness. He was not now ashamed to give his opinion if it was asked for, for he talked easily, and was never afraid of his words failing him at a pinch. He knew how to respect wisdom, or high position, or established reputation; but he did not carry his respect to the point of being awkward in their presence. A duke, a millionaire, a minister, a great beauty or a leader of fashion, were pieces on the social chess-board whose relative importance his tact taught him how to appreciate; but it was not his character to worship at any of these shrines.

London got to like him; he was a rising man, and he was neither pushing nor a prig.

It never stopped to inform itself that the young man was pleasant company, because he passed through the great London calendar of parties with no second thought but to enjoy what was enjoyable, to see what was to be seen, and to learn what was to be learned. He took what came in his way, had no ambition of any kind, never aspired to be better off than he already was, and made no pretensions to be anything but what he actually was.

There was a great ball at Lady Aveling's London house, and Lady Aveling stood high in the fashionable world. A large house in Cumberland Terrace, and a series of dinner-parties and balls through the season, were all that the limited resources of the House of Aveling could accomplish. Life at Aveling Castle was but a "poor tale;" no one for a generation past had shot the Aveling coverts, or seen a hunter come out of the Aveling stables; but poverty, though novelists will not admit it, is no hindrance to success in the London world: anything but insignificance will go down there. To be fabulously rich is, of course, a help in the struggle for prestige, but wealth by itself will do absolutely nothing;

while to be very poor positively adds a zest to high positions, social tact, and social energy; and it was these latter qualities which made Lady Aveling's balls and dinner-parties more desirable than those of rich duchesses where the champagne was infinitely better iced and the *menu* infinitely better chosen.

Edward Wynter was there. He had been pounced upon by a Member of Parliament almost before he had spoken to the lady of the house; and this gentleman was developing his ideas on the chief topic of the day with great force and clearness, imagining that he was inspiring a writer on the *Mail*—it was the beginning of the young man's second year of employment on the paper, and all London who knew anything at all knew of it—but this representative of an important constituency was unaware that our hero's article for the morrow was already written, and that his conversational efforts were being quite thrown away. Still less did the Member guess why it had come to pass that his young friend's light day's work was already accomplished, or what it was that had brought him so early to Lady Aveling's ball.

It had been a few words which that lady had

said to him when he had come to her box at the Opera the night before—"I want you, Mr. Wynter," she had said as he was leaving her, "I want you not to forget my little dance to-morrow; some old friends of yours are coming;" and the young man had known perfectly well that this meant Lady Aveling's sister, Mrs. Dashwood, and her daughter. It was now eighteen months since he had parted from this young lady, and that parting had been intended by both of them to be final.

Leaning with his back against the wall, assuming an air of respectful and impressed attention, and his thoughts wandering very far off, Edward Wynter was glad to entrench himself behind the broad shoulders of Sir George Dering, while he made his survey of the crowd which filled Lady Aveling's drawing-rooms. That lady, fortunately for her guests, did not carry the filling of her rooms so far as some hostesses; she drew the line at semi-suffocation, and so arranged matters that circulation among her guests was just possible, and that it never happened with her, as it sometimes happens elsewhere, that her acquaintances could reach no further than her staircase. So it was that Mr. Wynter's eyes could penetrate into

the further room and see Miss Dashwood sitting by her mother's side.

A face and figure, indeed, not likely to be passed over in the most cursory glance. It was Miss Dashwood's third season, and the judgment passed when she was first presented was that she had the very prettiest face of any girl in London. It was not a classical beauty, nor what our contemporaries choose to call an aristocratic beauty, and which they conceive to reside in a thin Roman nose and a small, supercilious mouth; it was not the southern style of beauty, of black hair, olive skin, and dark, flashing eyes; it was a type of beauty which is essentially English, of the fair-skinned, fair-haired sort, and than which the world at large is ready to acknowledge that nothing is more exquisite and more lovely. It was the beauty that resides in soft, delicate tones of skin, in clear, well-opened, youthful eyes, in a certain openness, trustfulness and directness in the expression. A man might look at that face and try to fathom the meaning that seemed to underlie that curious, sweet, intent look in the mouth and the eyes, and the more he looked the more puzzled he would get; and the examination was perilous, as many

men had found to their cost ; among them, as we know, our hero.

The social race, however, is not to the swift, and not often to the fairest. Pretty young ladies get more admirers and partners than proposals. Miss Dashwood was not, indeed, fast, and therefore not out of the race on that account, but as one among several daughters of the rector of a poor parish, and allied to such a needy family as the Avelings, her prospective poverty was marked enough to make a topic of small talk in the circles she moved in. "Poor Amy Dashwood ! her people won't be able to give her a trousseau even," was one of the speeches about her that circulated in the world. It was all but true. Alas for the romance of daily life ! Three summers of London balls and parties and breakfasts had passed over Miss Dashwood's head, two winters and autumns spent in rounds of visits in country houses, and the prettiest girl in all London had received not one single offer of marriage !

She knew that the man who had once given her a surer proof of devotion than any other of her admirers was now in a position where success was already attained, and where further success was surely awaiting him.

"Do you see your old friend, Edward Wynter, talking to Sir George Dering?" said Mrs. Dashwood to her daughter.

"Yes," said the girl, without, however, looking that way.

"Do you know that he is one of the most rising young men of the day, and that they say the Whigs want to get him into the House?" said the mother.

"How mistaken we all were about him, were we not?"

"My dear," said the mother, in a tone of very rational remonstrance, "it is all very well to say 'we.' No one should have known better what was in the young man than you, and you know you deliberately, and of your own accord, broke off your engagement with him."

To this home truth Miss Dashwood made no reply, and, at the same moment, a partner came for the quadrille which was just beginning.

Edward Wynter watched her curiously as she went through the figures of the dance. There is, perhaps, no such perfectly graceful movement in the world as a young English girl's who has worn off the awkwardness of

early girlhood and got the quiet self-possession that a very little going out is enough to bestow.

Never had she appeared to him so beautiful, never had every movement of hers seemed so instinct with grace. He remembered a particular curve in which her hair grew upon her forehead, and it gave him an odd, irrational pleasure to see it there still. When he had known her before, there was always some indefinable obstacle to his looking closely at her; some sort of a mist seemed to hang before his eyes which had interfered with such accurate observation of her as he was now making. It positively seemed strange to him that other people, as well as himself, were not wrapped in admiration of this girl's grace and beauty; and yet he knew himself not to be prone to such admiration. He had seen, and had well known, within a year or two, women with established reputations for beauty, and he had invariably been disappointed in them.

Sir George talked on, and Edward Wynter, still half hidden behind that stout baronet, watched the dancing of the quadrille and the break-up of the last figure. Miss Dashwood, leaning on her partner's arm, passed close to

where he stood, her white dress almost touched him. He avoided looking at her as she came near; it is easy enough in a crowded room not to notice any particular person, and it was clearly not for him to bring himself to Miss Dashwood's notice. Sir George and he both stood closer to the wall to let the dancers pass. He looked down to the ground for an instant as her dress touched him.

"Mr. Wynter," he heard, and looking up he saw her hand held out to him. The pleasant voice he knew so well, and the sweet smiling eyes he had looked into so often. How different this look in them and that one which he remembered so well that last day that he had suddenly told her he was a ruined man, who must work for his bread!

Their hands met, and she looked questioningly, with serious eyes, into his face. Her partner was acquainted with Sir George Dering. The four persons formed a little group talking gaily together; but Edward Wynter could detect a little undertone of gravity in her manner. She presently dropped her partner's arm. They all had to stand so close together that the perfume from the bouquet of geraniums and violets which she held in her hand

came to him, and brought before him in a moment with curious strength the association of the little drawing-room at the Rectory next to the conservatory through which these very flower scents had been wafted into the room. There it was he had often found her sitting alone, there he had found her on the day he had last parted from her; and again that look in her eyes, which he had made so sure had revealed a base spirit, came vividly before him.

While the memory of that interview was with him, there was not much chance of even Miss Dashwood's eyes working any fascination.

"Have you spoken to my mother?" she asked.

"I am going to say how do you do to her now," he said, and he made a half movement.

"Please take me to her," said the young lady, putting up her arm and turning to nod to her partner. Edward Wynter gave her his arm, and they walked across the crowded room.

"Was there not something at one time between young Wynter and Miss Dashwood?" said her partner, Lord Bewly, putting his eyeglass up and watching them as they stopped in an apparently deeply interesting conversation.

"To be sure there was; they were engaged to be married when the old man's ruin came."

"Ah, to be sure! I remember—no money to run for, 'scratched' at last moment; girl knew what she was about."

"She made a mistake that time!" said the Baronet; "that fellow's got lots of running in him."

His lordship put his glass up again, and watched the couple for a moment curiously. "I'll lay on the girl yet," he said, "doing a waiting race, I can see; come on hand over hand presently, and win pulling double! Remember what I say," and his lordship sauntered off to exercise his delicate humour and to bring to bear his appreciation of high motives and his wide knowledge of human nature upon other incidents of the social life around him.

There is a good deal of commonplace talked in most ball-rooms, but I doubt if any less interesting conversation passed that night than between Edward Wynter and Amy Dashwood. They talked cheerfully enough about past and future social doings—how Miss Dashwood had spent the winter in Rome, the summer before that in Germany; they talked about common friends in the country.

Yet there had been a time when even such conversation as this would have possessed an exquisite flavour for Edward Wynter; to hear her voice, to watch her face, was enough for him. He had never stopped to ask himself if she were other than other women. Now he did ask himself this question. Now that he had learned so much of the ways of the world, he saw that there was no infatuation whatever about it all. Her voice was exquisitely modulated, her eyes brighter than any woman's he had ever looked at—her manner, her face, each movement full of a perfect beauty and grace, but these things did not work the old enchantment upon him. The old charm was gone; the spell was broken. He was her lover then, and now only an admirer.

CHAPTER VIII.

A DEAD LOVE.

MISS DASHWOOD could not guess this. She had never failed to come up to her own standard of what was fitting—how was she to guess that she fell far short of Edward Wynter's? Her version of what had happened would be that two people had become engaged to each other, and when things so happened that it became quite evident that they were preparing to live together a life of abject poverty, then they had agreed to break off their engagement. She liked Edward Wynter very much; to part from him had cost her a great deal. To be sure the first word of parting had come from her, but then it would hardly have looked well if he had suggested it. How could she, a quite penniless girl, marry him who had become quite as poor, and had talked in a vague,

boyish way of working hard for his living. He had lived all his life in a rich house, she all hers in a very poor one. She knew what the pinch of poverty was—had heard discussions about money, and saving, and expenses all her life, and had a horror of such a prospect before herself. To him poverty was only a name, and to make a fortune not an out of the way achievement.

So she argued her poor spirit into having been a reasonable prudence, and his generous wish to abandon everything so that he possessed her, into nothing but a boyish ignorance of life; and it never for a moment occurred to her that when she revealed to him this same commendable prudence and good sense she had revealed to him that she was nothing in the world but a thoroughly commonplace young lady. What a service to render to a man, and how she might have plagued his soul all this time if, instead of telling him plainly that she could not marry him, she had let her father and mother break off the match, and exhibited herself to him as a martyr!

Poor Miss Dashwood had no suspicion of the real state of things. She had no need to be

conceited to know the power of beauty she exercised over men. How could she fail to think that she who possessed this power could bring back to her feet a man who had already been so completely subjugated? So she never doubted but that Edward Wynter only delayed to declare himself from hesitation lest she herself should not desire a renewal of their old relations. They met very often at balls and parties, they rode together in the Park, and it was a generally understood thing that young Wynter and Amy Dashwood had come together again. Miss Dashwood was convinced that his feelings for her had never changed, and her manner towards him was, she thought, sufficiently marked to indicate to him that it would not be premature for him to speak.

Yet he did not speak. In truth, Edward Wynter, with his thoughts occupied with the arduous profession he was engaged in, could not bestow much of their keenness on the solution of the little social problems going on around him. The diplomacy of young ladies was wasted upon him. He never doubted but that he was to Amy Dashwood what she had become to him. To be sure, she was now to

him something that she had never been before. He had lost the woman who had won his love, but it took him by surprise to find in Miss Dashwood—whom for months past he had brought himself to believe a shallow, commonplace girl—a charming companion who shared all his own sympathies and reprobations, quick-witted and pleasant-mannered. This was the secret of his attraction—he knew no woman, old or young, with whom he would more gladly exchange his thoughts for half an hour.

It is no wonder that Miss Dashwood was deceived. She never had been so certain of anything as that Edward Wynter was still in love with her.

Mrs. Dashwood was always very cordial with the young man. She had asked him, when they first met, to call, and a few days afterwards he did so, in the afternoon. Mrs. Dashwood was at home, but Miss Dashwood alone was in the drawing-room when he came. They talked freely; there was no constraint between them. It was to Amy Dashwood's thinking so like one of those old visits of his to the Rectory, which she lately had often recalled: the servant would take his horse round

to the stable ; he would come in unannounced, walking round to the south side of the house where the conservatory was, then through that into the smaller drawing-room where he knew she would be sitting. Then she remembered how when he caught sight of her his face would brighten. How sure she had been of him ! Then he would pause a moment to look at her, and she would rise to meet him, and he would take her two hands in both of his and kiss them before he held her in his arms and kissed her. It seemed only yesterday, and yet nearly two years had passed since then.

All this was in her memory as they spoke together. In former days he had not talked as he was talking now. In those days he had been more serious—silent, indeed, at moments, watching her, though, curiously, always—then telling her suddenly how he loved her, and what he would do for her if he could, and speaking in a wild, quick, earnest way which had sometimes startled her. Those things that he used to say came back vividly to her now ; she could, she was sure, have remembered every single word of those passionate declarations of his. How he had loved her !

He talked very differently now—unconstrainedly, pleasantly, told her anecdotes of the people she knew; was quite natural and like himself; did not seem to wish to shun any particular subject, and yet talked of things that any indifferent person would talk of, with a manner friendly, pleasant, and amusing had it come from any one else, and which yet was unwelcome from him to her, and gave her an odd feeling of strangeness. Could it be that he had changed? It had not occurred to her before, yet what more likely? He must long ago have given her up entirely, during the long months after he had parted from her, when he was living in London as she had now heard, and struggling as yet without any achievement of a position: he must during this period when he was hopeless of success, as he had once told her, have been hopeless of winning her whose winning could only go with success. In the course of that long time of his probation, must her memory not have gone quite away from him? Had any more hopeful love offered itself, the love of some woman to whom his hopeless poverty had seemed no obstacle?

Her mother came in, and the girl held back

a little from the conversation, nourishing these not pleasant thoughts, and watching whether her former lover's manner would be unembarrassed with her too, and whether she could not surprise some indication of his secret thoughts. She was a clever girl, quick to observe, with quickness sharpened in that fine school, Society, but not observant enough to perceive how Edward Wynter's inclinations lay. With her mother he spoke unreservedly, and that lady being an intelligent person, full of lively talk of things and people, he seemed to Miss Dashwood to give himself up willingly to the pleasure of conversation with her, and except for the occasional necessary reference to herself as a third person, he seemed wholly engrossed by her mother's conversation.

He paid a long visit then he got up and went; Mrs. Dashwood parting from him with every show of cordiality and graciousness.

"A quite charming man," said that lady, when she had rung the bell; "it is a treat to meet any one so clever and original. How do you find him, Amy?"

"Very much altered, indeed mamma," and the young lady walked to a table and re-

arranged the flowers on it, keeping her face from her mother's sight ; but she could not keep the tone of her words from her observation. Then Mrs. Dashwood knew how it stood between her daughter and her former lover, and having hoped it was otherwise, was vexed, but said not a word.

The Dashwoods went out a great deal into society, and Edward Wynter met them very often. They never failed to speak together, sometimes he danced with her, but their relations with one another never changed to a more cordial tone than when they had first met, nor did they even for a moment touch on the subject of their broken loves. People who heard this old story and saw them now again coming together prophesied a complete reconciliation, but the closer watchers—and there are many close watchers in a London ball-room—said no, their ways were not the ways of lovers ; there was nothing between them now ; no love lost between them, and so on.

This, however, was to some extent a mistake ; and if it were now as it had once been between them, it would not be Amy Dashwood who would put their poverty forward as a bar.

CHAPTER IX.

NUMBER NINETY-NINE, GRAFTON STREET.

It has been suggested that the world of London, in its hunger for the new and the odd, finds to its liking many things that to outer barbarians might seem little acceptable. People with musical hobbies, with political hobbies, with artistic hobbies, people who can think and can talk of nothing but their particular subject to all comers; all such people are tolerated and even liked the better for labelling themselves so distinctly, even though their iteration is apt to inspire, sometimes ridicule, and sometimes fatigue; even though they are men capable of telling a young lady just out the last news from the training stables of talking to a minister of political economy, to a duchess about science, or to an aldeamr, of art or literature.

The happy few who can make a speciality of

immense wealth can make very good social play with it, as no one needs to be told, and we have shown how, in Lady Aveling's case, straitened circumstances are no bar to a high standing in the London world; but Lady Aveling's large and well-lighted rooms, the crowd of servants, and the abundance of almost eatable ices and almost drinkable champagne, would hardly have passed for poverty, but for what the world knew of Lord Aveling's mortgages and involved estates. There are instances of a much more unmitigated kind of poverty than this winning its way in this contradictory world of society.

Mrs. Fontaine, the widow of Colonel Arthur Fontaine of the Guards, was a signal instance of such success.

Her late husband, an extravagant man and a violent-tempered one, had done her the disservice of spending every shilling of her small fortune, after having done the same by his own. He had neglected her and his children, and he had involved his wife and them in the rupture which he had brought about with his own family. She was a proud woman; and when, after his death, the noble family to whom he was related very properly and chari-

tably offered to provide for their kinsman's two daughters, their mother remembered the cold and indeed somewhat hostile reception they had given to herself as a bride, and refused their help.

When the spendthrift Arthur Fontaine had written to his father, the Earl of Dimsdaile, at Dimsdaile Castle, to beg that a carriage should be sent to the station on the following day, to meet himself and his wife, that nobleman, who had had no previous intimation of his son's marriage, was not unnaturally indignant. They had travelled quickly from Florence after their marriage, but the same post which brought Captain Fontaine's letter brought some account from other sources of the marriage and of the bride. "My wife is the most lovely and most charming person in the world," was all the son had said; but a friend's letter told that she was a singer at the Opera who had just made a brilliant *début*. An anonymous letter added some details; she was the daughter of a Portuguese Jew *impresario*, who had lent to or won money of Captain Fontaine. This was true; but some further particulars, of a scandalous and personal nature, were quite untrue.

Falling thus suddenly into the domestic circle at Dimsdaile Castle, bringing such a character with her, and coming with so very prodigal a son, it is not to be wondered at that the Earl, his Countess, and their five daughters accorded Mrs. Fontaine a kind of welcome which, though not a vindictive woman, she never forgot or forgave.

In time the truth came out. The *impresario* father—a fat man with a frogged coat, and much jewellery—was a fact; but the other allegations were unsupported. Mrs. Fontaine was very pretty, had great charm of manner, spoke English with a most delightful foreign accent, and had a voice that set the musical world beside itself. Society was soon at the feet of Mrs. Fontaine and her husband. Then came Colonel Fontaine's death, and the offer of help from Lord Dimsdaile, and her refusal of it; and herein Mrs. Fontaine showed herself a remarkable woman. Most people who had resolved to refuse would have done so curtly at least, if not rudely. Mrs. Fontaine wrote a long letter in her peculiar, graceful phraseology, full of pretty sentences, which, to be sure, meant very little, and she ended by refusing. It was difficult to gather from

the letter exactly why, but the refusal was absolute.

Lord and Lady Dimsdaile were not displeased at the tone of the letter and their daughter-in-law's proper pride. They renewed their offer; again Mrs. Fontaine, with a new effusion of pretty gratitude, refused it. The Dimsdailes felt rather small. The correspondence, neatly tied up with blue ribbon, was shown to several of Mrs. Fontaine's grandest friends. One great lady, a duchess, was enchanted with the spirit and the good feeling of the widow. She insisted upon being entrusted with the letters, and her Grace's chariot lumbered all through May Fair and Belgravia that afternoon, bearing everywhere the little blue-ribboned packet and the story of dear Mrs. Fontaine's devotion to her children.

When years went on, and the Honourable Mrs. Fontaine actually was known to gain a livelihood by writing reports for the newspapers of concerts and operas, society was strangely moved to an enthusiasm of admiration. Her daughters grew up; she began to give little musical parties (she understood music thoroughly), and there was nothing

in all London like the music that was heard in her poor little house in Grafton Street. Never were parties so successful. Great artists intrigued to be allowed to play or sing there; it was a passport for them to every concert room in London or Paris. To have the *entrée* of Mrs. Fontaine's house was an honour that many people who "went everywhere" would have been glad to boast of. When some such fortunate person spoke of the mysterious precincts of Number 99, Grafton Street, silence fell upon the dinner party or the club group where the fact was mentioned, and less privileged ladies and gentlemen saddened at the reflection that they would probably never penetrate into this arcanum.

The interior of Number 99 was certainly, in a way, peculiar. The drawing-rooms were characteristic of Mrs. Fontaine. She was known to have excellent taste; her own and her daughters' dress was exquisite, but her rooms were a marvel of shabbiness. There were never enough chairs, and some of them were not safe to sit upon; the chief article of furniture in the drawing-room, besides the piano, was a narrow horsehair sofa; the curtains were of red moreen, and scanty.

"Please mind that dreadful hole in the carpet," she would say, smilingly, to a distinguished guest. "I think that is the one that Prince So-and-so caught his foot in the other day, when he fell."

"Yes," she would say, "Duke, I think you can venture to sit in *that* chair!"

Her distinguished guests delighted in this; it was so refreshingly original. They all agreed that she was the cleverest woman in London, and her manner was so perfect with that charming little foreign half drawl.

People who found themselves in Mrs. Fontaine's house felt themselves to be the salt of the earth. To be of the select few who were invited, argued that one was either infinitely cleverer, or handsomer, or more highly-born, or richer, or more influential, or more meritorious, or more notorious in some respect, than the rest of the world; and many of the guests got to think they must possess all these advantages together, to such a condition of good humour and complacency did they arrive at in 99, Grafton Street.

The guests in that house were certainly selected with care. Foreign diplomatists, people of high rank, foreign and English, only

if they were remarkable for something besides their rank ; three or four distinguished authors, artists, politicians ; one or two anecdote-mongers ; among ladies, high rank in the fashionable world, or great beauty, was hardly a title to admittance, unless it was supplemented by some special accomplishment or charm of manner ; but the peculiarity of the house that immediately struck every one was the almost entire absence of young men and quite young ladies.

"Society in London is ruined by boys and girls," was one of Mrs. Fontaine's often repeated maxims.

She would tell her daughters that the presence of a dozen shy, dull girls, with their eyes on the floor, and only daring to say "Yes" and "No," was enough to make any party stupid ; and these young ladies had benefited by this precept as well as by the practice of their mother. *They* were not shy, and they were very far from dull ; nobody could have accused them of keeping their eyes on the ground, and their conversation was by no means confined to "Yes" and "No."

The clever, cynical people among the guests, and the aggregate of cleverness and cynicism

was considerable in Grafton Street, did not wonder at the exclusion of young ladies, seeing that two very charming ones were always at hand, but they asked themselves, why exclude young men? They would have supposed that the maternal instinct should have moved Mrs. Fontaine to the opposite course, but, their wonder expressed, they ended by admitting that Mrs. Fontaine was so clever, be sure she had some excellent reason of her own for what she did.

It was the measure of Edward Wynter's acceptance in London society that he was admitted within these delightful precincts. "I want you," Mrs. Fontaine had said to him one day when she caused him to be presented to her, "I want you to renew your acquaintance with Lily."

"But," said the young man, "I never knew any one with so charming a name."

"Yes," said Mrs. Fontaine, "and to speak frankly, and as one ought, it was she who bade me be sure to ask you to our Thursdays—Grafton Street, Number 99, you know it?"

"Indeed I do," said the young man, laughing, "as one knows Paradise! You are very kind."

"It is an invitation that is not altogether mine, you see."

"I assure you I am very curious."

As indeed he was; and going there on the following Thursday, he discovered the mysterious Lily to be no other than the little girl with the large umbrella and cotton gloves whom he had met in the waiting-room of the *London Mail*, and whom he had more than once encountered and spoken to in the passages of the office. What a change from the shabby little person he had made friends with! She had just finished singing a pretty Venetian ballad; he had held back a moment at the door, not to interrupt the singer by his entrance, and listened to the plaintive burden of her song.

It was a house in which it was absolutely impossible not to be fascinated. The eldest daughter had, at a very early age, married, and become a widow—a very charming one—and her bereavement had occurred so soon after her marriage, and now so long ago, that neither the outward nor the inner signs of widowhood were visible about Madame Ileva. A Count Ileva had been born in some mysterious recess of Poland, apparently for the

express purpose of conferring the estate of widowhood upon Mrs. Fontaine's elder daughter. No one had known much about him, no one seemed to regret him, and if any one of the guests ever mentioned him at Mrs. Fontaine's parties, it was to say in an undertone, with a cautious smile, "Poor fellow! yes, I remember him. He valsed wonderfully." Madame Ilcva might perhaps have forgotten to be melancholy about her bereavement, if it had not happened that a pretty, pensive smile was one of her particular attractions. Critical people, however, would say that she used to have that same pretty smile six years ago, before her marriage. Count Ilcva had been very poor, and his wife returned to her mother's house on his death.

The two young ladies were not unlike. Both of them had the clear, well-shaped grey eyes of their father, the dark lashes and eyebrows of their mother, and her pale complexion and smooth skin and mobile features. They were pretty, not with the prettiness of bright colouring and plump cheeks, which so often does duty for beauty in English ball-rooms, and is, it must be admitted, an admirable imitation of it. They were, in every sense of

the word, charming young ladies. Mothers of other young ladies would look at these slim, graceful girls, with their pleasant smiles, their low voices and mildly intelligent volubility, their wonderful accomplishments and educated society manners, and think with dismay of the awkwardness, shyness, and mental and physical clumsiness of their own daughters, and then, getting home, they would, as mothers will, set up the two young ladies of Grafton Street as standards of perfection to be imitated in every possible way; till at last a reactionary feeling was aroused against these model young ladies, and some bolder spirits were heard to speak of Mrs. Fontaine's daughters as artificial dolls, and as "snaky, uncomfortable girls," very clever, no doubt, but without a spark of genuine feeling about them.

It was, in truth, a little bit of the great war always being waged between manners and morals: a skirmish on the great battlefield as to whether these two things are not antagonistic and incompatible—Dr. Johnson against Lord Chesterfield over again. Can your heart be sound if your manners are good? Is the sweetest kernel not found in the roughest husk? Does virtue not invariably reside

under an ungainly exterior, and is a man who takes his hat off to a lady not almost certain to be a scoundrel? I leave the discussion where I found it, not presuming to decide.

The frequenters of Mrs. Fontaine's drawing-rooms were by no means the sort of people to vote with Dr. Johnson on this question; nevertheless the general opinion was that there was a little bit too much artificiality in 99, Grafton Street. True, in Mrs. Fontaine's little affectations there was a delightful foreign flavour which carried them off, but the daughters were, or ought to be, it was thought, thorough Englishwomen. Their training was too perfect; it was very pleasant to have to do with such graceful, composed, clever, young ladies, but there was about it all a spice of something almost theatrical; not in the least what our critics mean by *stagey*, but that perfect art which a few of the best actors and actresses have attained to, and whereby they can at times almost imitate the behaviour of real ladies and gentlemen, and the ways of real drawing-rooms. The Fontaines seemed to some observant people to be always performing a little comedy together, to "act up to each other's points," as theatre folks have

it, to know their parts thoroughly, and to require an audience. No one was simple enough to think there was any true human nature about them,—not even that sort of second nature which the proverb tells us comes from habit.

It is easier to describe these two exquisite young creatures together than separately, so strong a family resemblance was there between them. Though the elder was a married woman of twenty-five, and the youngest little more than a child of seventeen, the two sisters dressed alike; seldom in the innocent muslins and tarletans of ordinary English young ladies, and which seem so delightfully to reflect the simplicity and *naïveté* of their fair wearers. Mrs. Fontaine's daughters often wore the silks and richer dresses of older people or more married people; but even in the eyes of female critics they never seemed to overstep the line between right and wrong dressing, so exquisite even in these difficult eyes was the make and fit of their dresses, so marvellous their *coiffures*, so admirable the simplicity, and so perfect the harmonies of the tender greys and faint neutral shades of colour in which they appeared.

They were both slight, graceful, and pretty,

but Madame Ilcva was the prettier ; they were both accomplished, and sang and played like professional musicians, but the second daughter had the more perfect voice,—conversation was impossible when its clear soprano tones were heard ; they were both clever, but Miss Fontaine was admittedly the cleverer of the two.

It was she who was singing as Edward Wynter came into the room for the first time. It was a Venetian song, a sort of ballad, and every one knows that it takes some discretion to sing such a ballad, for one may be overpathetic and thereby ridiculous, or one may miss the humour that always lies somewhere in these North Italian songs, and then the whole thing is unendurably lugubrious ; but Miss Lily Fontaine might have been a gondolier's daughter, for the ease and vivacity with which she sang, picking her way through the quaint, tortuous note-passages with a dainty precision that caught every connoisseur's ear in the room, and changing her time to a slower movement, as she came back again and again to the pretty, plaintive *ritournelle*, in a way that showed there was in her something very far beyond a mere peasant's artfulness.

Edward Wynter came as the last notes ended, and fixed his eyes upon the singer. It was indeed the little girl whose acquaintance he had made in the newspaper office. He thought of the shabby black stuff gown she had worn, and looked at her exquisitely-fitting pearl-grey dress, delicately relieved by a touch here and there of a darker shade of grey; he thought of the monstrously ugly little hat she used to wear, and looked at her elaborately dressed hair, which even he, in his male ignorance, knew had been touched by an artist's hand; he remembered her fluffy black gloves, when he looked at her tiny hands, so marvelously cased in close-fitting kid.

She seemed glad to see him. They were old friends, for many times since that first encounter, had he, meeting her in the passages or waiting-rooms of the office, stopped and spoken; learning her business on the paper, telling her something of his, but never caring to inquire anything of her home history. He did not recall to her their common experiences of the business world; they talked of the other world—the world of society; and he did not even remind her, further than by the fact of claiming her acquaintance, that they had met

amid such much less brilliant surroundings. It was a wonder to him to hear this—as he had thought—quaint, quiet little person, wrapped up in her “copy for press,” with seemingly no outlook upon any world save that very narrow one of the Opera House and concert-room and newspaper office, talk so well the usual conventional talk of an ordinary society-going young lady. It was like thinking to have finished a pleasant book and finding that it has another volume.

“I only wonder we have never met before,” he meant in the great world.

“Yes,” she said, “for I hear you go everywhere.”

“I know you go everywhere; that is why I wondered. How is it?”

She laughed. “It is because London is so big. Two everywheres do not make an anywhere.”

There was something in her way of speaking that struck him as unusual and yet pleasant. Her voice was sweet and low, but very clear: all that she said she spoke quickly and incisively, as if she had meant to make that very speech long ago, very different from the common drawl and hesitancy of less quick-witted young ladies.

He looked at her curiously, wondering whether the little sally she had made was of her own making, or picked up at second hand. She was holding her two hands clasped on the handle of her fan; she put it into her left hand and held the palm of her right towards him, with a pretty turn of her white wrist.

"You are thinking of my black cotton gloves, are you not?" she said, with a little smile.

"I never could have guessed you had such pretty hands!" he said, laughing.

She held it out as if for inspection. It was a very well-shaped little hand, slender and graceful like herself, and the palm of it, with the grey kid tightly stretched over it, not much bigger than a crown-piece.

"I could never quite understand those cotton gloves of yours," he said, seriously. "Why did you wear them? Was it a disguise?"

"Yes," she said; "I dressed for my part. Could you believe seriously that any one could be called Champernowne?"

"Seriously, I think you deserve an odd name, if you will take that as a compliment."

"No," she said, shaking her head, "I will

not. It is a mistake to be eccentric ; it is a mistake not to be like other young ladies." People laugh at one. Pray, never tell me again I am odd."

He looked at her, and thought he had never seen any one so armed *cap-à-pie* against any shaft of ridicule.

"Unless you wish me to be quite insincere, I shall never tell you that you are like other young ladies."

She looked a little displeased. What have I done to make myself so unlike the rest of the world ? "

"Is it not something to wish not to be singular ? I have seldom met any one before who did not at least wish to be thought original."

"Of young ladies ? "

"Yes, of the few I have known at all well."

"Of Miss Dashwood, for instance ? "

"Why do you ask ? " he said, looking quickly at her.

"Only," she answered, composedly, "because I can see her now, behind you, looking at us—watching us."

There was an odd, serious look on the girl's face. Edward Wynter did not turn round,

but he laughed as he answered, "I am not in Miss Dashwood's confidence, so I must not presume to tell her character, must I?"

"I thought you knew Miss Dashwood very well?"

"So I do," said he, pleasantly, "and I will go and talk to her, for I have not seen her for an age."

From which little dialogue it may be gathered that Edward Wynter was quite able to take care of himself amidst the quick-witted society of 99, Grafton Street.

CHAPTER X.

“UN PHILOSOPHE REGARDANT LES ASTRES SE
LAISSA CHOIR DANS UN PUTS.”

A MAN embarked on the voyage of life may think himself particularly fortunate if, before starting, he has been provided with that which shall act as a talisman and preservative against one particular form of danger. It is surely a particular hardship, a monstrous circumstance, that a man beginning the struggle of life with his eyes fixed on certain objects to be attained, should suddenly, by the force of circumstances over which he has no sort of control, should suddenly, I say, find himself twisted and turned about and diverted from his said serious purpose, and see all his plans made abortive and himself carried away, *nolens volens*, into quite new paths—paths studded with all manner of stumbling-blocks, stones,

brambles, thistles, and every sort of impediment that makes a path a hard one.

No man in chalking out the plan of his life dreams of making allowance for this sort of deviation ; he marks his course on the chart, and sets sail ; but he never, as it were, adjusts his compasses. He never says, I shall go on very fairly, travelling safely enough on my journey, and then suddenly I shall make an insane, devil-possest jump to one side, and find myself plunged up to the neck in a quagmire, out of which I shall extricate myself (if I ever do get out) in the sorriest plight imaginable, and to all spectators an abject and ridiculous object. To leave metaphor, a man never foresees that he, like the rest of the world, is ever going to fall in love ; or, if he does foresee the catastrophe, he is resolved that it shall be in his case a reasonable, philosophic sort of proceeding, with choice of time, place, and person in his own hands.

How particularly happy, then, is that individual who, by pure accident, shall have learned to hear the syren's song unmoved, shall have had the good luck to find out the false notes in that bewitching music !

Edward Wynter was, as we know, in this

fortunate predicament; he was able to journey through life in the character of an Ulysses with his ears stopped. The daughters of Steropé could not lure him to his destruction with their most cunning strains. The fowler's snare was to him a very palpable piece of contrivance, which he could promise himself should never entangle him. It was extraordinary, he said to himself, what idiots quite sensible, grown-up men were constantly making of themselves on this point; and having had his own dearly-bought experience, and having his thoughts well occupied and his hands full of work, he was able to leave this foolish passion of love on one side as a possibly disturbing element in his life. In other words, Mr. Edward Wynter, walking across the room to where Miss Dashwood was standing, was able to contemplate that young lady from a thoroughly dispassionate point of view, and to arrive at the conclusion that, as young ladies went, she was a thoroughly agreeable girl, and certainly as pretty as it was possible to be. If he could be dispassionate here, he reflected, he was safe anywhere.

Miss Dashwood was one of the very few young ladies who obtained admission to the

difficult circle in Grafton Street. It was not to her face that she owed her *entrée*, though she ranked as an admitted London beauty; nor to her birth, nor to her pleasant manners and pleasant talk, but because of her possession of all these things together. He had had the fortune to fall in love with this paragon of young ladies, and the better fortune, as he fully believed, to fall out of love. There he should have stopped; but it is difficult to be quite wise at twenty-four. He should not have made friends with this young lady; he should not have patched up a peace with the vanquished enemy so soon after the battle; he should have remembered enough of his University logic to know that like causes lead to like effects.

Most men's and some women's ideal is born with them, and usually when they meet with some approach to it in a living person, they invest him or her with the wanting attributes, and straightway fall down in adoration before it. This was what had happened to Edward Wynter. His fancy had made an idol of Amy Dashwood, and his reason and his luck together had shown him what sort of shrine he had been worshipping at; but his ideal was not destroyed, and his fancy was always ready

to be at work again. A man who has had his dip into the sea of worldly experience gets a shock that rids him of a great deal of his enthusiasm ; and if he has occasion to fashion another idol to set up in an empty shrine, be sure it shall have more clay and less fine gold about it than the first occupant of that sanctum.

What a fuss he had made, he now sometimes reflected, about this affair between Miss Dashwood and himself ; what a very irrationally romantic idiot he had been to expect that a girl should wish to keep her word, and marry a poor man whom she had accepted with a fortune ! He would at times contemplate, with not a little contempt, the hysterical sentimentality of many women—more assumed, to be sure, than real ; and he got to entertain a sincere admiration for the calm good sense of Amy Dashwood. It was, he began to persuade himself, a charming characteristic. She neither was nor pretended to be romantic. She often joined with him in ridicule of the common affectations of enthusiasm and self-sacrifice ; it was, they agreed, a sham, a thing assumed ; it was a mockery of what could not possibly be true in human nature.

There was something so real, so sterling, so straightforward about Miss Dashwood; nothing in her of the trickiness, and pretty ways, and affectations of other women. And she was such a perfect companion—so intelligent, so much interested in all that interested him. It was a friendship of the most delightful kind. With a male friend, a man has always to do with a possible rival. A man's success and well-doing may always be a cause of some shadowy and unexpressed envy to his friend, if the friend be a man; but in friendship between men and women this is less probable. "How delightful, then, such a companionship as this," thought Edward Wynter, "a woman with whom I can sympathise on every single subject, from whom I need withhold nothing!" He had even once or twice, in talking with her, recalled, with some delicate touches of humour, the story of their former parting, making a little fun of his own boyish romance and disappointment, and he had not perceived that she had shrunk from these reminiscences; but she had been careful that he should not notice this shrinking on her part.

Every day, looking into his eyes, she had asked herself, "Does he still care for me?"

and the answer was always doubtful till the day she had first heard him talk in this way of her treason to him—so she now thought of it to herself. After that day the answer was no longer doubtful, and her out-look on life thereafter got greyer and drearier.

One day, however, he made a discovery. It was towards the end of July. She had been staying with her mother in London from early in April. The season was drawing to a close. They were riding together in the park.

“This will be our very last ride,” said Miss Dashwood.

A very curious and a very unpleasant and a very unaccountable feeling came over him. He tried to laugh as he made some necessary reply, but the smile died on his lips. He had been seeing this girl now every day, and often two or three times every day, for several months; and he had until this present moment not asked himself how he could bear the loss of this companionship. Does a man, he asked himself, parting from his dearest friend, feel the pang he now felt? He looked at her more inquiringly than he had done for a long time. Was the secret of his liking to be in Amy Dashwood's company more than a liking

of her friendliness towards him, of her pleasant, open ways, of her quick sympathies with his often unspoken thoughts?

She was bending a little forward as she stretched her hand to stroke the sleek neck of her horse. There was a foolish sort of pride in him that this girl who had been so much to him, with whom he was now so much brought together, was so immeasurably more graceful and pretty than any other woman. He even liked to think that she sat her horse better, that her hat and her habit, down to the most insignificant point of her equipment, were in simpler, truer, and better taste than any one's else. The sun was shining in her face, and as she averted it a little, it shone right into her clear young eyes, and showed depths of limpid brown like the depths in a moss agate; it fell on her brown hair, and flecked it here and there with gold, it warmed the tints of her face, and showed how pure and fine was the texture of the skin, and the hot sunlight shone right through the delicate ear, and glowed in it with tints of rich carmine.

Men are dull sometimes in seeing such things, and take their time to discover them, and then suddenly they burst on their perception in a single enlightening flash.

She guessed somehow, partly from her woman's instinct, partly from his long-continued gaze, partly from his long silence, that her sovereignty over his love, for so long in abeyance, was coming to her again, and turning her face towards him—her eyes still full of the sunlight in them and its glory still tingeing her face—and noticing his unwonted seriousness, she knew quite well that he was troubled by her beauty, and there came into her face that faint, inscrutable smile that comes now and then on the faces of fair women; the smile that is as old as the hills and as new as this morning's flower-bud, that the old sculptor cut on the marble lips of his Venus Victrix, and Leonardo drew on those of his Lady Lisa, the smile which is so unlike the smile of common joyousness, and which in simple men's eyes is so ineffable, and which they christen, in their simplicity, "cruel" and "mysterious," and I know not what, and which, after all, comes from nothing in the world but triumphant self-complacency.

It was Amy Dashwood's moment of victory, and a very sweet one indeed. She had but half cared for him in the former days when

he had so loved her, but she had longed intensely for this re-establishment of her sovereignty during all the long period of his estrangement. There are many women whose love is far less strong than their pride in being beloved, and this was so with Amy Dashwood. To her the crisis of their loves had come; the supreme moment with her was the moment when she was now again quite sure of him.

They rode side by side in a silence that was very unusual between them; then, coming to the end of the row, they drew up their horses for a moment. She turned her face towards him, and it was transfigured not alone by the mellow light in the sky, but by this same secret consciousness of her power; and as he looked on this girl's lovely face, its loveliness suddenly grew to possess its ancient power. She was to him again the woman he had loved, the old fierce fire burnt as strong as ever; but he was not now the boy he then was, she had not now her old inscrutability, he had not got to know the world, and to know her, so long and so well for nothing. He guessed by her face that she was sure of his love: he saw her triumph in her eyes.

"This will be our very last ride together,"

she said, repeating what she had said some minutes before, "are you sorry?"

"Why do you ask? Do you not know well enough that I am sorry?" He spoke almost roughly. He had never spoken like this before: she knew why it was.

"I thought," she said with a slight laugh, "that you were above putting yourself out for such a small matter. We have so often agreed, you know, how absurd it is to let anybody or anything be necessary to one's happiness. Those are your principles, are they not?"

"I have borrowed them from you."

"I beg your pardon, I accepted them from you, Mr. Wynter."

"You acted up to them on one particular occasion, Miss Dashwood," he said, still imitating her lightness of tone.

"Ah, yes!" she said, "I did." She changed her countenance and dropped her eyes.

"So you see you are more original than you think! It was you who formed my opinions. I was simple enough till you taught me the wisdom of indifference."

"You never cared for me in those days,

Edward, did you?" she had suddenly began to speak in serious tones. "It was only a boyish fancy?"

"Look, Amy," they called each other by their Christian names almost unconsciously to themselves for the first time since that love parting two years ago; "shall I tell you now calmly and rationally what you were to me then? I was a boy, you say; it was a passing boyish fancy, you think! why, I tell you, Amy, you were my whole life to me. I seemed to myself to have had no soul and no life before the day I first saw you. Your very presence lightened the whole world to me. It seemed incredible to me that there could be sorrow where you were. I could almost have brought myself to believe that there was some magic in you. By heaven, Amy, I did believe it! and for me there was, too. If you had told me you could move a mountain with your little finger, I don't know how I could have brought myself to disbelieve you. I know that you did work a miracle for me; you made the whole current of my life flow, which had stood still before I knew you. You can call this a boy's fancy; I tell you it was something beyond and greater than mere love. I did

not love you, you were too much to me for that. You were the sun of my world; your presence warmed and lighted my whole being. With your absence I thought my soul would have died again. You were a divinity to me—I worshipped you!”

He had spoken in the quick, eager, earnest way which she knew so well in him: he changed his tone again suddenly, and said, “Amy, did you ever hear of anything more ridiculous than this?”

Her hands trembled, and her breathing came fast. This extravagance of his did not seem excessive to her. She had heard him say things like this long ago, and in the same impetuous manner, and then even, they had thrilled her, but not with the strange delight which they gave her now. The tears almost came into her eyes, but they were tears of the most exquisite joy.

“You did care for me then, Edward,” she said, “though you are changed now; and now I am changed, too, from what I was—and now I understand you. When you said these things before, they seemed to me but half real.”

He watched her, but he did not speak. The

loveliness of her face seemed to him to grow, in some indefinable way, into fuller intensity and more perfect exquisiteness, as she thus almost in plain words told him of her new love.

"Now," she said, "you will never speak like this again, except to recall what is past and dead."

"Now," said Edward Wynter, speaking very slowly, and in a lower tone, "now, Amy, I love you as I did then—I love you with my whole soul and heart!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE WAY OF THE WORLD.

THE *London Mail* was a good property. Such intellectual engines as newspapers or periodicals or reviews, pass like estates, railway bonds, ships, or houses, into the possession of owners who are often signally deficient in any aptitude for literary possession. A man who never put on paper a lucid sentence of English in his life may own a journal whose opinions are respected by the whole world of intellect. As a rule, such a man is prudent if he is not clever. As a rule, the mere capitalist no more meddles with his literary property than he farms his own estate or navigates the ship that has become his; but there are capitalists and capitalists. Some men are aware of their incapacity, and some are not; and the *London Mail*

having become the property of an honest City drysalter who had retired from business, this gentleman, curiously unconscious of the depths of his own ignorance of politics and letters, set to work to increase the circulation of his paper on the same principles as those on which he had successfully extended the drysalting business which had enriched him.

Now, the *London Mail* had a respectable, rather than a large, circle of readers. It appealed to thoughtful and moderate people, who wished to read their own views clearly put in grammatical English. Such a class is naturally a small one, and the circulation of his new property did not satisfy the new proprietor. Personally he did not approve of the somewhat meagre lucidity of style of his paper. It bored him. It was not picturesque enough, nor emotional enough; nor, as he told the editor, smart enough.

He had called at the office, and developed his views fully. "I want you," said the drysalter, "to put more 'spice' into the paper."

"More what, sir?" said Mr. Bryant.

"More spice—more 'go,' more human nature!"

The editor told him bluntly that he would

only write in his own way, and only admit writing that pleased his own taste. He warned him that any lowering of the paper's tone, or change of style, would endanger its sale among its own readers. The drysalter did not appreciate these refinements, and suggested the employment of the flashy pen of a certain eminent literary hack. The editor refused; the capitalist insisted; and Mr. Bryant at once threw up his editorship. The drysalter had desired nothing better. He went from the office chuckling and rubbing his hands.

In course of time the polite world was electrified by the appearance in the *London Mail* of a hysterical article on a social question. The old prestige of the paper gave weight to this unaccustomed utterance. It was quoted and seriously commented upon by the weekly press. The circulation went up for a time, but a dangerous competition was aroused; it was an invasion of ground already strongly occupied, and the previous occupant of the emotional province of journalism followed suit with a strong leader upon High Church Curates. The *London Mail* replied with a thrilling article upon ladies' dress;

but the rival paper showered upon its readers a perfect catalogue of highly picturesque leading articles upon cooks and lady's-maids, upon cabmen, chignons, capital punishment, and the shopping of ladies, and the *London Mail* was eclipsed. Its own readers had been disgusted, and but few new ones secured.

The proprietor saw his mistake. Many of the contributors would not, or could not, conform to the new taste. The new editor himself was full of dash and life; his own articles were, in their way, delightful; but in spite of precept and example, his staff lagged behind him—they could not rise to his level. Moderation and good taste were still fatally conspicuous, and the new circle of readers were disappointed.

Edward Wynter flatly refused to adopt the new style. He was told that his services would be no longer required; and again he was a free man, a homeless adventurer as before in the field of letters.

All London—all the London of clubs and drawing-rooms—knew in a week that he was no longer on the *London Mail*; and as no man can be young and successful with impunity, the story of his dismissal was circulated

by his secret enemies with several not very flattering embellishments.

"Young Wynter, yes," said one club acquaintance; "an awful temper—threw a file of the *London Mail* at his editor's head! I am very sorry for him; but one can't be surprised."

"Was that it?" said another. "I heard that Bryant had favoured him from the first, and pushed him on to the staff: and when Bryant went, the new man soon found out what a stick the fellow was, and told him to go."

"I really am glad to hear this," said a third, "for the story I heard was a bad one. They said he was getting too fond of his brandies-and-soda, and latterly could never come up to time. They can't stand that on a newspaper, you know—plays the devil, sir," and so forth; and Edward Wynter, going as usual into society, found by no means the welcome he had previously encountered. As a leading-article writer on the *London Mail* he was somebody; as an unemployed adventurer, he was entitled to absolutely no consideration at all. He was, for aught that anybody knew, a beggar; just the sort of person—a club friend

said of him one day—who would suddenly ask a man to lend him five pounds—a devilish awkward sort of fellow to know !

To be nobody in a great city, and to know nobody, and meet nobody who will express their sense of one's unimportance, is disagreeable enough ; but to have a hundred acquaintances, and to be reminded at every minute of the low place one holds in their esteem, is a tenfold aggravation of the unpleasantness of the situation. It is a great mistake to suppose that such wounds to a man's pride and sense of dignity are salutary. It is only the envy and uncharitableness of the world that leads them to use the common phrase of a man so treated, "It will do him good—take the conceit out of him." I suspect that we have all of us in our hearts less conceit than we get credit for ; and I am quite sure, that to deprive us of what modest self-confidence we possess is to do us as ill a service as the world is capable of.

Edward Wynter felt his troubles keenly, but he was accustomed to this very sort of trouble. He had enjoyed a good deal of depreciation in his day. He had ranked as a fool, and had not been quite sure but that

he was one. Now that he was set down as in some sort an impostor, there was an element of injustice about public opinion that made it still harder to bear ; but on the whole he did endure the trial pretty well ; or, what is nearly as good, made no sign of how keenly it affected him. He could have put by the whole matter if he could have been sure of one thing—if he could have been quite certain that Amy Dashwood would not go against him when the rest of the world did. He had now, unfortunately, no enthusiasm in regard to any profession of faith and constancy on the part of Miss Dashwood. The time had been when to have let any suspicion of anything so ignoble as a weakening of her faith in deference to the world's opinion, would have made him feel a hot flush of indignation. All this was past. He knew her to be delightful to him in every way ; he knew that he loved her, he had heard her tell him that she loved him ; but he knew only too well that she was only a woman—not a book heroine ; and he had got to be satisfied that she should be only this. He did not even want to revive his old illusions. He did not want to believe again in a perfect woman. Let her only hold fast to

him, now that the world had cast him off and had let him drift; let her but come up to the commonly accepted standard of faith among women; let her new allegiance not be shaken, and he would ask for no more. But asking this, he asked too much of fate; and he never knew how complete was his fall till he found a letter from Miss Dashwood, beginning—

“MY DEAR EDWARD,

“I hardly know how to say what I have to say to you. You will of course know what it is going to be. My mother absolutely forbids me to continue my engagement with you. She is, as you well know, the least worldly person in the world” [“I do not know anything of the sort,” thought Mr. Wynter]; “but she says that it would be as wrong for me to keep you, under present circumstances, to your word to me, as it would be for you to think what I said binding. It is heart-breaking to me” [this was nearer the truth than her lover believed] “to give you up, but what can I do, what can we either of us do? We are so poor.” There were four more closely written pages to this effect, and the ending was: “My mother and I leave

town to-morrow, and we are therefore not likely to meet again for several months. If we ever do come together hereafter, we shall at least have nothing to reproach each other with.

“Believe me to remain always

“Your sincere friend,

“AMY DASHWOOD.”

A man who had fallen in love twice over with the same woman almost deserved this letter. Edward Wynter made sure it was her own letter, and that it conveyed her own sentiments. He had not the wit to see that these balanced phrases were not the writing of a woman who, as he had reason to know, had given him her heart—such as it was to give. He did not know that she had torn up a dozen letters because her mother would not let them go; he did not know that a woman who has given ever so little of her heart is never so inexorable as this in the dismissal of her lover—that she would have told him to go in one line, and bade him not despair in the next, and half recall him in the last. It was the stern Mrs. Dashwood, a loving mother if a worldly woman, who had insisted finally upon

dictating this letter—doing this cruel kindness to both lovers, having a well-grounded confidence that her daughter would survive the laceration of her feelings, and get over her grief in a week, be fairly cheerful in a fortnight, and very much obliged to herself in less than a month.

There is something so exceedingly ludicrous in this sort of misfortune that it is very difficult for the hero of a story—even so unromantic a one as this—to emerge from the position with the due preservation of heroic dignity. A man so crossed in love has one of three courses before him: he may turn into the melancholy and puling lover; he may become a confirmed cynic—the man who having tasted the bitter waters of Marah will needs have it thereafter that no water whatever is sweet; or he may be more like a philosopher and more of a man, set his teeth, bear his misfortune with all the fortitude he may, and let time heal his grievous wound.

The wound in Edward Wynter's case was grievous enough, but he was a man of strong fibre, and brought up in a stern school of hardship where strong fibre is strengthened. This last blow, moreover, was as nothing to

what he had already suffered from the same woman, for now there was very little of disillusion ; there was indeed the deprivation of a thing he had delighted in, the loss of a woman who was very dear to him, but no disenchantment, no revelation of mortality in a divinity, as had happened with his boyish love ; and in time therefore he added this heavy load to what he had already to carry, and he bore the whole burden as patiently and cheerfully as a man well can who has lost his prestige, his fortune and his love, and who is aware that a dozen scandalous and ridiculous stories are circulating to his discredit.

CHAPTER XII.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

It was some weeks after Edward Wynter's receipt of the very dispiriting letter quoted in the last chapter, that he called one day for the last time at the office of the *London Mail*. He had during these weeks still written from time to time for the paper, in fulfilment of his engagement with the late editor, but that engagement had now come to an end, and he called to close his business relations.

"I wish," said the new editor, "we could induce you to stay with us."

"I desire nothing better," said Edward Wynter; "but how can I go on writing for you when you put my articles in the waste-paper basket?"

"Not all of them," said the editor; "that article of yours last week on cuneiform in-

scriptions was full of life and lightness. No pedantry, no heavy learning—that is the sort of thing we want, sir!”

“I feel really flattered,” said the young man; “but you guessed, of course, that I know nothing whatever about cuneiform inscriptions?”

“To be sure you did not; no man can write a lively article on a subject he thoroughly understands. Well, apply the same principle to literature and politics, and stay with us.”

“Quite impossible.”

“Why so? Now, my dear sir, pray listen to me. I am a much older man than you, and I will venture to give you a little advice.”

The editor was a stout, good-natured, bald-headed, middle-aged man, round faced and pale complexioned, whose one luxury consisted in the smoking, every day of his life, of twenty excellent Havanna cigars, and round whose not very saintlike head floated at all time a glory, or aureole, composed of stale tobacco smoke. Sitting comfortably in his red leather office chair, he rolled himself in it towards Edward Wynter, and tapping the young man good-humouredly upon the knee, and surrounding him (so that he sneezed

twice) with his tobacco halo, he addressed him thus—

“You are a young man, Mr. Wynter, and will not be offended at a lecture from a man old enough to be your father.”

“By no sort of means,” said Edward, “and I think it to be a very kind and friendly act in you to take the trouble.”

“Good. Now, what I want to urge upon you is this—here is a chance such as few men get in their lifetime. You have talents of a high and of a peculiar order.”

“Thank you very much,” said Edward Wynter.

“Oh, my dear fellow, it is no flattering speeches that I want to make you, but a plain statement of fact. You can do us good service if you choose, and we want to keep you. It is, I submit to you, a good bargain on both sides.”

“I cannot do the sort of work you want.”

“You can if you choose.”

“But I must not choose.”

“Why so?” asked the editor.

“I can write trash about cuneiform characters, because neither I nor any one cares a button about the men who wrote them; but politics and literature are serious things.”

"Fiddlestick!" exclaimed the editor, with friendly warmth, "you are too enthusiastic, my dear boy!"

"I have no enthusiasm," said the young man.

"But politics," said the editor, "are a comedy, and literature a farce, in these days. Success depends on the strength of the *claque*. The man with most friends on the back benches makes the best speech, and the man with most friends among the critics writes the best book. You can't interfere with the laws that govern these things—you can't frame new rules for the game."

"I can never consent to call an honest man a rogue, nor praise a man's book whom I think a noodle."

"You must get over this dangerous attack of principles," said the editor humorously; "we have all had it in our time, but I have known no one so bad as you are."

Edward Wynter laughed with the editor. "It has been hanging about me a long time," he said, falling in with his humour, "and, to speak the truth, the symptoms are as bad as ever."

"Well, well, it is very right and proper, I

have no doubt," and he got up and offered the young man a cigar. "Good-bye," and shaking hands with him, he added, "if, in course of time, you should think of any work in our line, you will let me hear from you, will you not?"

"Certainly I will," said the young man; but his mental reservation was that such a time never could come, and he left the editor's room with a free conscience, but with a terribly oppressive feeling that by his own act he had shut himself out from his last chance of work.

Walking along the dimly-lighted passage of the office, and occupied mentally with no agreeable thoughts, he stood aside to make room for a person advancing from the opposite direction.

"You never come to Grafton Street now," said the remonstrant voice of this person, as she arrived opposite to him. "I am so glad I met you."

It was Miss Lily Fontaine.

The young lady was muffled up in her usual somewhat baggy shawl; she carried the well-known umbrella, and she wore the cotton gloves, over which they had so often made fun. The most vivacious and talkative of young

ladies in her mother's drawing-room, Miss Fontaine was a singularly demure, prim and reserved person when she wore what she called her "office uniform."

She raised her veil. He had never known her to do this before, and he saw a pale and rather careworn face and a pair of earnest, sympathetic eyes, which plainly told him, without words, that she was sorry for him.

"You never come to see us now," she said; "you have not been to us for exactly three weeks!" Her tone was very reproachful.

He smiled. "You don't know my melancholy story, Miss Fontaine."

"Indeed I do."

"Yes, but not all. You never heard of my throwing an inkstand at the editor's head, did you?"

"Yes," she said, quite seriously, "I knew you had done that."

"Indeed! Then perhaps you did not know that I got my place on the old staff by favour, and that the new editor found me quite incompetent?"

"We heard that. Every one said so."

"Yes; but one thing I am sure you would not believe—you would not think it true that

I drank so much that I could not hold my pen."

"Did you really, though?" said the young lady; "that was very wrong of you, was it not?"

"Yes; but you should be shocked, Miss Fontaine; you should not give your hand to a man capable of such things."

"Why not?" said the girl, simply. "We were always friends, were we not, and why should I be shocked at anything you do that is not dishonourable?"

"So you really believed all these stories, and were not horrified?"

"To be sure I did; we all did."

"Your mother, too?"

"No," she said, laughing, "she did not; and I think it would take a good deal to set my mother against a friend. She has wondered a hundred times why you had given us up."

Edward Wynter pondered. "I have been nowhere since these stories went about—since these things happened, you know; but I will do myself the pleasure of coming to Grafton Street to-night."

"Do," said the girl, with a suddenly beam-

ing face, and he was puzzled at noticing that she seemed really glad. They shook hands, and parted. "By heavens!" he said, as he walked away, with a slight return upon him of the enthusiasm which he had just declared he did not possess. "By heavens! I could not have believed it; that little girl is capable of standing by a man when he is down!"

CHAPTER XIII.

MRS. FONTAINE'S DRAWING-ROOM CARPET.

EVERY guest of Mrs. Fontaine in Grafton Street knew the pattern of the carpet in her drawing-room. It was a marvel of ugliness. On a broad expanse of blue ground were represented immense full-blown cabbage-roses, with petals as large as the leaves of the vegetable after which they are named; each group of flowers was several feet from its neighbour; and the carpet, which had been obviously intended for a very large room, being very conspicuously unfit for Mrs. Fontaine's confined apartment, it therefore happened that the curious guest, whose gaze had alighted on one of the gorgeous flower-groups, had to let that gaze travel a considerable distance to find another.

People who knew Mrs. Fontaine's house got

to know also the geography of the rose-groups, so strong an impression had been made by their conspicuous appearance. One, they guessed, was under the hearthrug, one was out of sight in a corner of the room, another was all but concealed by an ottoman, but the one group that every one knew was beside the piano. Every one knew this one, for the mistress of the house had long made a nightly custom of standing in one particular spot to receive her guests, and that spot happened to be close to the piano, and upon the most conspicuous of the aforesaid rose-groups. Without knowing it, she invariably stood upon the centre of the huge, full-blown monstrosity that composed the middle of the floral ornament.

We have already observed that Mrs. Fontaine was a most remarkable person; every one agreed to that. There was in her various successes, chiefly her social ones, something inscrutable. How was it that there was such a charm about everything that this woman did? Why were her parties more agreeable than any one else's; why were her daughters more accomplished and more self-possessed than other people's; how was it that she

ruffled no one, gave every one his due, and yet seemed to every individual more gracious than to any one else ; why did she seem never to exert herself to amuse her guests, and yet always to keep them amused ? Was it her tact ? Many people were full of tact, by general agreement, who had not one tithe of her success. Was it cleverness ? There were fifty London ladies who had a greater reputation for wit or learning ; but no one would for a moment set up these formidable persons in comparison with Mrs. Fontaine. So, in a circle where social success is highly prized, people sometimes set themselves seriously to watch Mrs. Fontaine. They would watch her at work as a young or unskilful painter watches by the easel of a master, and thinks to catch the secret of his grand effects in the seemingly careless strokes of his brush.

Between this real admiration of Mrs. Fontaine's skill and their half envy of her manifest superiority, they made among themselves a little fun of their hostess's social artifices. These observant persons had noticed Mrs. Fontaine's habit of standing upon this conspicuous bunch of carpet flowers ; they pretended to think that the various degrees of

cordiality with which she received her guests could be measured off, as it were, upon the pattern of the carpet. They constructed a little fable upon the subject. It was easy, they said, to know the exact social position of a guest by merely noticing how far Mrs. Fontaine advanced from the central flower to receive him. She seldom moved more than a few inches for any one; there was a distinct scale, they said, but the range was small. For a great minister, a bishop, an English duke, a foreign prince, a famous foreign diplomatist, she would invariably step as far as the huge green leaves of the group. There were three or four rosebuds which might have been mistaken for short carrots, extending beyond the rest, and Mrs. Fontaine's critics declared they had been reached but three times—once for a famous Hungarian patriot, once for a distinguished German prince of the blood royal, and once for a well-known English man of letters. She had never, in human memory, gone further than this for the most honoured of her guests.

When Mr. Edward Wynter's name was loudly announced at the stairhead, Mrs. Fontaine's room happened to be nearly full—as

full as she ever allowed it to be. It was a surprise to her guests to see this young man enter this particular drawing-room, so entirely had he gone under, so completely had the great social wave swallowed him up. He had been nowhere for three weeks. There was a little pause as he walked towards the hostess. There was a faint look of intelligence among the people who had made the foolish little jest about Mrs. Fontaine and her carpet. "See," the look seemed to say, "how the fine social tact of this lady will let this rather presumptuous young man perceive how he must stand in future with society!"

Mrs. Fontaine occupied her usual place. "How delightful this is going to be!" thought the more ill-natured observers: "How painful for that foolish young man!" thought kinder ones: "What a difficult thing to do," said impartial critics, "and how admirably Mrs. Fontaine is going to do it!"

What a surprise, what a disappointment, what a marvel! could it really be true? Mrs. Fontaine was positively coming forward to meet her guest. She was holding out both hands to the young man, in her pleasant, cordial, foreign manner. She had already left

the central rose,—surely there was some mistake?—no, she had already reached the outer fringe of rosebuds—incredible as it might seem, she was absolutely half a yard beyond them!

Extraordinary woman! Incomprehensible circumstance! There could be only one explanation: Mrs. Fontaine always had a reasonable motive for her actions,—*she* was not the person to feel a foolish enthusiasm for a friend in difficulties. She was a hard, calculating woman of the world, all *her* emotions were under control, they were only the pieces with which she played the great social game of skill. Therefore her proceedings in regard to Edward Wynter were accountable in one way only. Society clearly had made a mistake about the young man. *She* had, with her usual penetration, seen through this mistake, and had hastened to be the first to let the victim of it perceive that she believed in him.

All this may seem very trifling and unimportant, but in this case it was the turning point in a man's career. Moralists may talk about our being able to depend upon our own strength alone, fighting single-handed the

battle of life, getting no occasional shelter of another man's shield, and looking to no strengthening of our endurance in the long burden of the fight from any friendly voice, but no one who has ever himself stepped down into the arena believes in these theorizings. The real battle is not so fought; at any rate, the victory is not so won. We are not such heroes that we can do without human sympathy, and now and then the encouragement of a well-wisher.

Edward Wynter, when he felt the pressure of Mrs. Fontaine's hand and saw the friendly welcome in her eyes, knew enough of the world to know how much this reception meant; he was not so foolish as the clever people around him; he did not set down all her actions to half a dozen unworthy motives. He ascribed it to loyalty and to honest kindness; and he was right. Mrs. Fontaine was a woman true and loyal to the heart's core, and she had moreover the good, old-fashioned, much decried virtue of amiability. She was a thoroughly good-natured woman, and that was half the secret of her success: the other half was that she was an extremely clever one. She chose to be blind to the disagree-

able side of people's characters; she magnified their good points. To have talked for ten minutes to Mrs. Fontaine was to believe one's self a much more charming person than one ever had before. Then, again, her sympathies were often strongly roused. There were people to whom she was enthusiastically friendly—an enthusiasm that was so unobtrusive that the object of it often did not guess it, but he gained by it unconsciously. There are a hundred ways in which a clever woman of the world can smooth a man's path for him through the maze of society; and the best of it is that the man often walks confidently and pleasantly along this same path, wondering at his luck, or presuming on his merit at finding it so free from stumbling-blocks, and never dreams to whom it is that he owes the smoothness.

Edward Wynter was one of Mrs. Fontaine's heroes. She liked his good courage, his independence, his perseverance, his quiet acceptance of his success; and the warmth of her reception of him that night was partly due to the story she had just heard from Mr. Aveling of his interview of that very day with the new editor of the *London Mail*; and

there was also another cause, which we shall presently talk about.

Men seldom guess how complicated are the springs of apparently very simple actions. We seldom count the wheels within wheels which are always turning, or think of the many friendly helping pushes given to these same wheels; or, on the other side, of the very frequent sticks and stones with which malice can clog them. Edward Wynter no doubt thought it the simplest thing in the world that he should now be walking into Mrs. Fontaine's drawing-room, under the surely not very unusual circumstances of having been jilted by a fashionable young lady, of having ceased to find work on a newspaper, and of having been made the victim of some particularly annoying scandal. He was far from knowing how little this epitome of the case told all the facts.

In the first place, he did not know how much Mrs. Fontaine was his friend. He did not know that it was at her suggestion that Mr. Aveling had recommended the new editor of the *London Mail* in his own interests not to part from his young contributor. He would never have supposed that the editor

would have reported the conversation to Mr. Aveling an hour after it had passed: still less that Mr. Aveling would as faithfully have repeated the report to Mrs. Fontaine, giving the stout editor's exact words and manner with some little humour—

“By gad! sir, that young fellow hasn't a bit of the rat about him. It's like an extract from a child's copy-book to hear him talk. Prefers his principles to his bread and butter, though I offered it to him very thickly spread indeed. Principles indeed! what business has a fellow without a penny in the world with such luxuries? Extravagant young dog! he might as well possess Raphaels and Titians!”

Thus ironically did the worthy editor of the *London Mail* express his own high approval of Edward Wynter, an approval that did not lose in the telling of the story by Mr. Aveling to Mrs. Fontaine.

I have said that there was another cause for Mrs. Fontaine's interest in this young man, and particularly for her welcome of him that evening. Very little ever escaped that lady's keen eyes; people felt their closest secrets absolutely ooze out in her presence,

there was among her friends a positive chronic epidemic of confidences towards her. She had guessed that closest of all secrets—the secret of a young girl's heart. She had known it before Lily herself had known it.

CHAPTER XIV.

UTOPIA.

LILY FONTAINE had grown up in the most artificial society in London. She hardly knew what it was to be a mere child; in that Grafton Street household, as in those of quite poor people, life was too serious for the luxury of a careless childhood. She had never had a playmate, at her youngest she would have been almost ashamed to possess a toy. Her business and her interest in life were her mother's work, and the entertainment of her mother's guests. At an age when girls have not put away their last dolls, Lily was a woman of the world, and could talk, not childishly, of the affairs of grown-up men and women. She grew up to a most perfect familiarity with this curious, insincere, clever, scandal-loving, malicious society of intellectual

men and women : she could hold her own with the very cleverest of these people, and could set her own bright young wits and quiet composed manner against any assault of man or woman. "She is of the world, worldly, and has the hardness of a woman of fifty," said her mother's guests who had amused themselves by trying to find a fault in the young lady's defensive social armour.

They knew absolutely nothing about it. Training, no doubt, does a great deal, but nature has a strange way of asserting herself. There was, in spite of Lily's sedate manner and knowledge of life, deep down, much of the unconverted simplicity of childhood—a childish contempt for the artificial life around her, an undefined yearning for some freer, simpler mode of existence. Among these well-dressed crowds, bright with lights and flowers and the flash of gems, there would sometimes float across the fancy of this little town-bred girl, who had never walked through a meadow in summer-time, heard the song of a wild bird, or picked a hedgerow flower—there would come before her at such times a foolish and impossible vision of a quite different sort of life, far away from the hurry and turmoil of street life, away

from the dull skies and thick air of London; of a peaceful life spent in bright, calm, sunny summer days among green lawns and silent woodland glades, with the velvety turf barred and flecked with purple shadow and golden light; and this paradise should be peopled by beings as unlike the society around her as could be. They should be perfectly sincere, and natural, and calm, and earnest; there should be no feverish striving one with another; in her Elysium there should be neither envyings, nor malice, nor backbiting, nor wealth, nor poverty, neither useless luxury nor any want.

This is how nature asserted herself in the case of Miss Lily Fontaine. She was a shrewd and worldly-wise little person; nevertheless, having never done her fair share of play and childishness, she would now amuse herself with these fancies of an extravagant ideal so little to her credit.

When she first met Edward Wynter he had immediately struck her as being a very fitting inhabitant for her Utopia. He fell in with her ideal as being a person of a calm, straightforward, purpose-like manner. Perhaps there was another reason. Lily herself was in

heart somewhat of a Bohemian. All the people who came to Grafton Street were wealthy, or seemed to be; some were overpoweringly *millionaire*, and fatigued her with talk of boxes at the opera, moors, race-horses, steam yachts, hot-houses, and other uninteresting accompaniments of wealth. Edward Wynter was refreshingly poor; he told her so frankly; he talked to her of his hopes and his fears, his difficulties and successes; she sympathized with them. There was this at least in common between them, that they were poor. Her type of heroism was a simple one—that a man should show a bold front to the world, and work his way onwards through his trials uncomplainingly and looking to no help or favour; that he should be frank and honest in speech, careful of his honour, gentle in manner, yet without fear and without reproach—of the old knightly type, in short. In Edward Wynter she thought that she had found this very ideal realized, but she partly mistook, for her ideal had grown from what she observed of him.

Her mother was Lily's confidante—she alone knew the secret of her odd fancies and

day-dreams—and having no thought of secretiveness to her mother, she told of her frequent meetings with Edward Wynter, sang his praises, quoted him, referred to his opinions, took his part stoutly if Mrs. Fontaine tried to suggest a word of disparagement; and, in short, unconsciously and unsuspectingly laid bare the secret of her heart long before she herself knew there was a secret to reveal.

“Lily,” said her mother one day, “would it be a disappointment to you if I were to tell you that you are too old now to go to the office by yourself?”

The young girl turned deadly pale. She saw her mother’s scrutinizing eyes upon her, and she blushed suddenly again to the roots of her hair.

No further words ever passed between mother and daughter; but they understood one another perfectly. Mrs. Fontaine had long before taken her measures; she had satisfied herself that the man who had won her daughter’s heart was an honourable man. She was a worldly mother, yet she did not think it was for Lily’s happiness that she should marry a wealthy man or a man of high birth. Such a man as Edward Wynter was described

to her seemed to her the husband she would have chosen for Lily beyond any other.

Then Lily went about with a new consciousness of her love—a terrible burden, for she could not speak of it even to her mother; and what sort of a love was it that was on one side only? for of this she was certain, that neither by word, sign, nor action had the man whom she had thus suddenly found enshrined in her heart, even hinted at any return of her feelings. This was very bitter to Lily Fontaine, but more hard to bear was what was to come; for the story that was told about London of what had once passed between Edward Wynter and Miss Dashwood, and that these two had come together again, soon came to Lily's ear. A strong, sharp, agonizing pain shot through her as, one day, herself unseen in the crowd, she had watched these two people—these two obvious lovers—ride past her in the Park. She looked into the lovely face of Miss Dashwood with a quite hopeless feeling. "How can he possibly care for any one but her?" she had asked herself with despair; and after that she had borne with her an almost insupportable load of jealousy. She hated herself for having that feeling, but she could not

resist it. It was ignoble and abominable in her eyes, but it overmastered her.

She had not yet, however, drunk the bitter cup to the dregs : and that which was to come was to be her own doing. It wanted only that Edward Wynter should perceive how she was so racked by this unworthy passion of jealousy, it wanted only that she should herself betray to him the secret of her weakness and her folly. This she was certain she had done on that occasion when she had spoken to him so pointedly of Miss Dashwood. He could not have mistaken the motive of what her evil genius had prompted her to say. He could not have failed, she was sure, to read in her eyes as well as in words the mean envy which she could so ill disguise. Never till then had life seemed to her quite hard and hopeless—never till then had the ill-fortune of mere existence come home to her ; and already her life was darkened by the black cloud of sorrow which is never so black as when it blots out the sun and cheerfulness of youth. Already Lily had uttered the passionate cry, “ My God, why was I brought into this world of sorrow ? ”—a frequent and rather obvious exclamation, which it is always well to defer as long as possible.

Her mother watched the girl anxiously, but could give her no comfort. Mrs. Fontaine's philosophy was that every one has his share of sorrow to bear, and cannot begin too soon to learn to support the burden. This was her theory, but she was a poor philosopher in presence of her daughter's suffering. Lily never spoke on the matter, but it needed no words from her to tell her mother what she felt, nor from her mother to tell Lily of her own silent sympathy. Mrs. Fontaine saw her daughter getting daily paler and thinner; her gaiety was gone; she grew restless. Mrs. Fontaine was alarmed. She reproached herself for her incaution in letting her child meet the man she had got to love.

In course of time came the misfortunes of Edward Wynter. Mrs. Fontaine, with the unscrupulous cunning of a mother who sets her daughter's happiness above everything, professed at first to believe the various scandalous reports that were current about the young man, and which she was perfectly sure were without foundation. If Lily would but believe these stories, she must cease to be unhappy about this unattainable love of hers.

Lily did, in the ingenuousness of youth,

believe what she at first supposed that her mother thought true, but her belief did not, to her mother's despair, lessen her love. Not a jot! She pitied him, and she loved him the more. Mrs. Fontaine was at her wits' end. Soon the report came to her of the termination of the engagement between Edward Wynter and Amy Dashwood. Mrs. Dashwood had taken particular care that this should become known. Then a faint ray of hope passed across Mrs. Fontaine's mind: if she could bring the young man and Lily together, it was just possible that something might come of it. Mothers are certainly the most unscrupulous of human beings, but, to be sure, actions that would disgrace other people become them best of any.

"I wish," she had said one day, "that that poor young man would come here again, that he might see that all his friends have not forgotten him."

Lily's face brightened.

It was shortly after this that she met him, and that the conversation passed that we know of.

The reader will now understand the unprecedented reception of Edward Wynter by Mrs.

Fontaine. It came of her liking for him ; it came of her wish to lend a helping hand in his need to a man she honoured ; it came perhaps most of all from her desire to please Lily. It is not without cause that I said there are wheels within wheels, and that simple actions come of causes that are not simple, and that lie both deep and wide. Mrs. Fontaine had not, to the astonishment of her guests, stepped a yard from her accustomed stand without reason.

CHAPTER XV.

FAIRYLAND.

WHEN Edward Wynter left 99, Grafton Street that night, his outlook on life was a far more agreeable one. Those slanders which but the day before had seemed likely to weigh upon him all his life long, had already begun to melt away. He had spoken to Mr. Aveling in Mrs. Fontaine's drawing-room, and he had alluded to these stories: they had circulated, he knew; would they be believed? "Yes," said his friend, "as long as you put in no appearance. No slander is too improbable to be believed of a man if he fears to face it; let him show, and it is never heard of again."

Edward Wynter took his advice. He went out in the world, and the world taking its cue from Mrs. Fontaine, received him warmly. By Mr. Aveling's counsel and with his assistance

he boldly placed his foot on that lowest rung of the literary ladder that his friend had once spoken to him about. He worked his way steadily upward, but he had no need to judge for himself of the alleged weariness of the ascent; he found more congenial work. His old newspaper had again changed hands; the drysalter before utterly ruining the *London Mail* had sold it, and the new proprietor had lost no time in putting the unconditional management of it into the hands of its former editor. Edward Wynter had accepted his invitation to return upon the staff. The old tone of the paper was restored, and the innocent readers, who knew nothing of these changes, condoned the temporary hallucination of their favourite journal, and welcomed its sudden return to good sense and good taste.

Edward Wynter's foothold in life was now firmer than before his temporary misfortunes. He had learnt to be surer of himself, he had lived down a little mild scandal, he had found that the work he could do was sought after. He had assured himself of the sympathy and friendship of the Fontaine family, and this he valued more highly than any other result of

his change of fortune. Against this was to be set the wound of his lost love ; no slight hurt, and one that, do what he would to get rid of it, persuade himself as he would of this woman's unworthiness, rankled as painfully as ever. Time goes a long way to heal these injuries, but the cure is not often complete, unless the patient be an unusually tough or a very light-hearted person indeed.

He was now quite sure that Amy Dashwood was an altogether unworthy and even ignoble person. He was angry with himself for letting her image still remain in his memory. He wondered at his own unreason, seeing how many women about him were superior in every way to this one who had so ill-used him ; and yet the spell that this one woman had cast upon him endured.

He was now a great deal in the society of the Fontaines ; the season was over, but their and his avocations kept them in London. Mrs. Fontaine and her daughters never left it, and during the dull autumn season, and the rather less dull season of winter, he was thrown very much with the family in Grafton Street.

He had one day surprised and also enter-

tained himself by thinking what good fortune it would be to any man—to himself, for instance—if he had happened to fall in love with Lily Fontaine; of course not without a due return of the same feeling from the young lady. He who accounted himself her friend, and could criticise her dispassionately, pronounced her to be perfect in every way. How intensely stupid of him, it amused him to reflect, to have been captivated by a shallow-hearted woman like Amy Dashwood, and not instantly to have fallen over head and ears in love with this really charming young lady! Need any one be prettier, he asked himself, than Lily, with her silky brown hair, her long grey eyes, and soft well-arched eyebrows, a shade darker than her hair? He watched her for a moment one day quite critically, and positively wondered at his want of susceptibility.

The winter had passed away; it was a warm spring day. He and Lily were sitting together in the park, when he condescended to make this critical inspection of the young lady, and these most rational reflections upon her. Mrs. Fontaine was a little way off, surrounded by several friends. It was the

beginning of the new season, and London was filling. They watched the crowds of fashionable people passing on foot along the pathway, and a little further off, beyond the low iron rail, were ladies and gentlemen riding slowly by.

He considered her face as one considers a portrait, quite at his ease, and as a connoisseur. He remembered the first time he had seen Lily's face, and had thought it rather plain; a sallow, schoolgirl's face, with the peculiar schoolgirl audacity of expression, half impertinence, half shyness; and now he wondered at his having been so unobservant, or at her being so changed. The lines were very fine, the oval outline very dainty, the skin very smooth, not brilliant in colouring, but full of a certain youthful freshness. What an artist it would take, he thought, to portray this curious translucency of the complexion, and how a great master's brush might linger with delight on the delicate curves of that tiny ear, marking its half shadow with a faint touch of rosy pink and bringing a brighter reflection of the same colouring on the corners of the mouth.

Suddenly, while he still curiously and lazily

watched the girl's face, a singular change came over it. She was looking at the people riding by, for the minute that his inspection of her lasted, speaking to him now of one common friend, now of another, as they appeared in the crowd of equestrians, and not seeming to notice how closely he was watching her. He saw her turn suddenly pale—almost white—and her eyes were set with a strange fixed expression upon a person in the distance. He followed her gaze curiously. Had Lily, then, her own little romance, like other people? He looked into the crowd for some confirmation of his suspicion, but he saw no one that would seem to justify it. He said nothing, and he carefully avoided taking any notice of what he had seen.

Her paleness passed away, and she looked at him with a curiously grave and almost reproachful expression that brought a smile to his face.

"I should very much like to know," he could not resist saying, "who it is that can make you so change countenance?"

She made no answer, and he half repented his impertinence. He looked into the crowd and he saw approaching them two people on

horseback whom Lily, with her sharper sight, had already recognized. One was Mr. Aveling, and the other was his niece, Amy Dashwood. She had come to London for her fourth season.

She was looking particularly well, to use that equivocal expression in its most literal sense ; he had, indeed, never seen her looking in such almost robust health. He had heard incidentally that Miss Dashwood had spent most of the winter in a certain western county, famous for its hunting resources ; and in the keen and exhilarating air of the hunting field she had evidently recovered from—and, indeed, rather more than recovered from—the fatigues of the last London season. Miss Dashwood's beauty, with its clear, brilliant colouring, was always improved by the trying ordeal which makes other women sometimes look pale and jaded. Such fatigues gave a rare refinement to the lines of her cheek, a tenderness to her complexion, and enhanced the brightness of her eyes ; but, on the other hand, an opposite effect was produced by what is supposed to add so much to the good looks of young ladies. Her face was—the word must be used—plumper, the lines a little bit

less delicate. Had Miss Dashwood been an oriental beauty, words could hardly suffice to do justice to the improvement in her appearance; but we of the North have less robust views on the subject; our æstheticism is of that foolish kind with which full and rounded lines find less favour than perhaps they should. We have not mastered the æstheticism of fatness, and any approach to it is fatal to romance.

With every desire to behave becomingly under the trying circumstances, Edward Wynter committed the indecorum—Lily's sorrowful, questioning glance was fixed upon him, and made the matter worse—he committed the almost unpardonable indecorum of pinching his lips together in the vain attempt to repress a smile. Such is man, and so small is the dominion exercised over him by lovely woman! Well, indeed, may the moralists remind us that beauty is but skin deep, and perishes like the flowers of the field—is here to-day, gone to-morrow, and much more to the like effect. Here was a man who had long discovered that his love had been very unworthily placed, and yet had he been triumphantly taken prisoner simply by the

beauty of this very woman—a captive who could not shake off his chains, and yet had learnt to despise his conqueror ; and, behold ! that same conqueror appears before him one day in all the pride of beauty and exuberant health, and, just because that health happens to be a trifle too exuberant to please him, the spell breaks, the chains suddenly fall, and the victim stands up a free man !

With every desire to set Miss Lily Fontaine in the best light before the reader, with the strongest admiration of that young lady, I must admit that this faint smile of her companion, telling to her quick wits the whole story of its origin, gave her such delight as she had never yet experienced in the whole course of her life—a delight that she felt to be almost wicked. Nothing was said by either of them, but Lily knew that after that the old reign of Amy Dashwood was over ; and if Edward Wynter had guessed nothing of his companion's thoughts, it was because men are impenetrably stupid in such matters, and never do guess anything.

But time was beginning to work not a wonder, but a very natural effect. The old tyranny of his past love had passed away, and

now there was beginning to grow up in him a strange sympathy towards this young girl. Remembering the strong passion of his love for Amy Dashwood, he could not set down this new feeling of his as anything akin to that; but she had got to be very dear to him, an almost necessary part of his life. A terribly dreary existence it would be, he one day suggested to himself, if he had to make up his mind to see Lily Fontaine no more. Once it had occurred to him what a violent passion he would put himself in if her mother were to inform him some day that Lily was engaged to be married. Could it possibly be that he, a grown-up man, had fallen in love with this girl, whom, from the very beginning of his acquaintance with her, he had treated almost as a child? Yet he had, and he knew it—and, conscious of his knowledge, got to fear that others would know it too—that Lily herself might; for it did not occur to him that his love for her would ever grow into a serious passion, a thing to be told of and reciprocated. Lily in love was really a thing not to be thought of gravely. He had never accustomed himself to converse with Lily without some reserve of banter; at its gravest, there

was some recourse to raillery on one side or the other.

"Lily," he said to her one day, "I want you to make me a promise."

She was half sitting, half leaning back on the ottoman in her mother's drawing-room; on her lap a collection of artificial flowers and leaves, from which, with the help of wires, she was composing, with him to an inscrutable amount of skilfulness, some flower ornament for her hair or dress.

He looked wonderingly at the deft and delicate movements of her fingers. Every now and then her eyes would be quickly lifted for a moment to his face as she talked; then, busied with her work, the lids would fall again, and the long lashes cast their shadow on her cheek, and her attention would be divided between him and her work, and her expression would vary from the animation of talk to the seriousness of the task she was engaged on. There was, in his eyes, something inexpressibly delicate and graceful about Lily Fontaine; her slender, nervous hands, whose tiny fingers looked fit to unravel the webs of the gossamer; her small, slim figure, and the curious, keen, subtle grace of her features and their expres-

sion had in them altogether something more fine and exquisite than the womanliness of other women. There was in her something of the slenderness, and gracefulness, and weirdness of those unsubstantial creatures that our fancy creates as dancing on summer nights—

“ By paved fountain or by rushy brook,
Or on the beached margent of the sea.”

It was positively with some little effort of the will that he could imagine Lily taking her part in the performances of this mundane life.

She looked up quickly and curiously, as she detected the unaccustomed seriousness in his tone. “I will make you any promise you ask of me,” she said.

“Promise me, then,” he said, bluntly, “that——” It really made him smile to suggest such a thing, and yet the suggestion was not an agreeable one.

“Tell me what?”

“That when you are—engaged, you will let me know a long time beforehand.”

She smiled slightly, and then her face a little darkened; but she did not answer. She dropped her eyes on her work.

“You are offended with me, Lily?”

"No," looking up for a moment ; but he saw clearly that she was vexed. He watched her. Surely Lily was not going to commit the enormity of crying ? Besides, there was too much human nature about tears, and no one ever heard of a crying fairy ! Positively her eyelids were trembling in a very suspicious way.

"Lily ! upon my soul I did not mean to hurt your feelings ; and how the deuce——"

"You should not laugh at me," she said, reproachfully ; "you know——"

"I know nothing ; I only meant that the day you tell me this I shall say good-bye, and never come near Grafton Street again as long as I live."

Slowly Lily lifted up her head, and gazed at him. There was no doubt about the tears now. She did not say anything, but she looked at him with curiously questioning and wistful eyes.

He sat down opposite to her. "Now, Lily, you know I couldn't stand it—could I ?" She shook her head. "What ! do you think I should not care ?" Lily nodded her head.

He took her hand in his—a tiny, a pitifully small and weak hand, as he looked at it lying unresistingly in his. If Lily had any heart at

all, and could care one bit for him, he would never let that hand go till she promised to let him hold it for ever. In the second or two that he held her hand in his, he had made one of those wonderfully rapid retrospects that the mind is sometimes capable of ; all that he had seen and known of Lily for these last two years came back to him. Then, for the first time, he recalled the look he had seen in her face that day in the park ; all the hundred little events that had unconsciously etched themselves on his memory now reappeared to him distinctly. Lily's long and constant faithfulness to him and his interests through good and evil report, odd moments that he had found her eyes fixed wistfully upon him, and at times speeches and looks that had seemed, when he had noticed them, to be some quaint, unaccountable outbreak of childish petulance : all this he read off in a second, and still holding the girl's hand in his. Could Lily have possessed a secret all this time, and could it be the one that he would give so much to know ? He feared it was not possible.

"Lily," he said slowly, "what should you say if we had been playing at cross-purposes all this time ?"

She looked into his face with her eyes full of an intent meaning. He was a fool, after all, not to guess what that meaning was, though a man, perhaps, does well not to be too clever in such matters, and a hero who is not ready to "burn his ships" is very little heroic.

"You, at least, have not guessed what you might have guessed," he said.

"No," she said, "I have not. There is nothing to find out, I think."

"Only that I love you, Lily!"

She shook her head sadly. "Now, I know you are laughing at me. It is very unkind of you!"

"I swear that I never was more in earnest. You would believe me, Lily, if you had any heart at all."

She looked steadily at him for a moment, incredulous of such wealth of happiness as he seemed to offer. The truth suddenly dawned upon her, and Edward Wynter, watching her anxiously, saw the light of a new life in her face. Her pale, listless features flushed as with the dawn of a coming day. She rose to her feet, and a slight cry of delight broke from her lips.

“Ah! Edward,” she whispered to him a minute or two afterwards as he held her in his arms, “if you could ever know how I have loved you all this time!”

END.

SPLENDIDE MENDAX.

SPLENDIDE MENDAX.



CHAPTER I.

A SEA PIECE.

ON a fine bright day in August, a good many years ago, before steamers had shortened the hundred and thirty miles of stormy sea which intervene between the most northerly cape of Scotland and the Shetland Islands, a smart trading cutter was beating against a fresh breeze which blew direct from Northray, one of the largest of this group of islands.

The progress of a vessel tacking against a head-wind is proverbially slow and tedious, and the tall cliffs of Northray had been in sight during the whole day from the deck of the vessel. As the sun went down the cutter

neared the coast, and the interest of the solitary passenger on board augmented.

The cliffs, which in the distance had looked like huge perpendicular walls of grey rock, acquired light, shape, and colour as they were approached, and as the sun, now declining to the west, slanted his beams against them, the traveller saw the light vapour which so constantly hangs over these northern islands converted into a golden haze. A fringe of white foam, where sea and land met, set off the deep reds, greens and yellows of these towering sea rocks, and, the boat running still nearer, the eye could perceive that they were pierced in places into recesses and caverns, through which the sea rushed and retreated with a resounding roar. As the vessel came nearer still, pigeons, gulls, and broad-winged gannets dropped from their perches, and circled in mid air between the vessel and the cliffs. The cutter was within a stone's-throw of the shore, when she tacked, and turning in her own length, pointed her head eastwards, and keeping well from the shelter of the land, ran rapidly towards a projecting headland.

The only passenger on board was a young man of three or four and twenty, fresh from

hard-won honours at an English University, now bound on a long visit to his uncle's Shetland home. He had been watching the nearing land without a trace of human habitation upon it, and had amused his fancy by thinking that such it must have seemed to the first boat's crew of Northmen—half pirates, half colonists—who had peopled these remote islands, and whose blood still runs pure in the veins of their hardy inhabitants. He pictured to himself these pagan adventurers of old looking upon the very scene that was now before him, the same cliffs with their clefts and pinnacles, and their sea-lashed bases and sounding caves all unchanged by the intervening centuries—the wheeling flight of the sea-birds, their wild cries, and the hollow roar of tumbling breakers then as now filling the air. He imagined the Northmen peering anxiously, as he was now doing, upon the continuous cliff line, for an opening through which to run their ships.

Presently the headland known as Roora Head was passed, and the lofty sea-board gave place, for a distance of some three hundred yards, to a smooth, sandy beach. A little river, forming a succession of sea pools, ran

gently by grassy meadows down the centre of a tiny wooded valley, and broadening into an estuary as its current met the sea, a narrow creek was formed, on whose beach were drawn up some dozen fishermen's boats.

The cutter, arrived opposite the creek, pointed her bows to the wind, and with one of her head sails hauled round, remained stationary.

On the shore the advent and the suddenly arrested motion of the cutter attracted attention and caused some commotion, and presently a boat was run down the sloping beach into the sea; as it touched the water a broad sail was set, and catching the full force of the wind from the shore the boat flew like an arrow through the rough water towards the cutter.

An old man and a boy managed the sail, and a young lady sat in the stern sheets, and grasping the tiller-handle guided the boat's course with evidently no unpractised hand.

"Is that one of your cousins, sir, as you was speaking of?" said the captain, with his lips placed close to Eric Ericssen's ear, for the whistling of the wind through the rigging and the splash of the waves made hearing difficult.

"I suppose it must be Miss Ericssen," said the young man.

"That is a relation, sir, a man might be proud of," said the captain sententiously; "it ain't so easy as it looks to steer a boat with the wind abaft through a sea like this. Point her bows just one hair's breadth one way or the other, and the wind catches her, she broaches to, gets pooped, fills, and goes down. Now, that young lady's touch on the tiller is as light as a feather, and as true and as strong as steel."

Eric Ericssen, though he had but a remote idea of the meaning of these nautical terms, assented to the proposition of the captain without inquiry, for indeed he was occupied in looking very hard at the yellow-haired girl who sat in the approaching boat. She was dressed in blue serge, with a short jacket of the same stuff coming not much lower than her waist, and buttoned across the chest with gilt buttons. A small felt hat, in which she wore a single feather of the erne, or sea-eagle, confined the thick, wavy, yellow hair, low-grown on a broad forehead.

To Eric Ericssen, still stirred with his fancies of the Northmen, the somewhat

matter-of-fact praises of the captain sounded not incongruously. It was fit that a daughter of the sea-loving Vikings should herself be fearless and skilful on her native element. And, in truth, the tall, fair girl, with eyes which seemed to reflect the vivid blue of the sea, with her hair repeating the tone of the golden beach, and her complexion, which was like nothing so much as the pale, rosy lining of sea-shells, had in her, to his idea, some vague repetition and reflection of sea-tints and sea-tones, and she got to seem to him, somehow, herself sea-born and sea-belonging. Such a form and face as hers, he thought, must Hilda the sea-maiden have had, for whom the Knight of Lofoden won the golden bowl—Hilda, the fair-haired daughter of the Sea-kings, who, when she lost her knight's love, made no complaint, but plunged into the whirling sea-pool bearing the guerdon with her, and was seen no more by men.

The boat dashed onward, now rising buoyant to the top of a huge billow, and now sinking almost out of sight in the trough of the sea. So close to the ship was it steered, that the yard and full-bellied sail scraped the vessel's side as the boat luffed round sharply under

the cutter's quarter ; and almost as the young lady's voice rang out "Haul down !" the sail had been drawn in, and the boat lay in the comparative shelter afforded by the larger vessel.

"Well handled, ma'am !" cried the captain, with honest enthusiasm.

The girl looked up, and smiled pleasantly upon the young man on deck.

"Is that my cousin, Eric Ericssen ?" she asked.

"Yes. Are you Miss Ericssen—are you Ruth Ericssen ?"

"Yes, I am. How are you to get into the boat ?"

"I must jump somehow ;" and with a word or two of parting to the captain, and watching for his opportunity as the boat rose and fell dangerously with the rising waves, he leapt down, and alighted safely in the boat. It was a harder task to get his baggage in ; but this too was at length accomplished, the rope that had been thrown to them was cast off, they pushed off from the vessel's side, and, as the boat started shoreward under the strokes of the two oars, the cutter resumed her course, and was presently out of sight.

"I wonder you are not afraid to come out in such a rough sea," said Eric Ericssen. "I am sure I should be."

His cousin laughed.

"Why do you laugh when I say I should be afraid? Remember, I am not a Viking—only the cousin of one. I have no courage except on dry land."

"I laughed," said the girl, "because if you were afraid you would not have jumped down from the cutter's deck. It was not safe or easy at all."

"That was because, if I had not, the captain would have carried me off to sea again, and I should never have made your acquaintance."

They laughed—so very small a thing makes young people talk, and so very small a joke makes them laugh.

Presently said Ruth Ericssen, "Do you know what I was thinking as I saw you standing on the deck just now? I was thinking of the landing of Telemachus in the strange island, and wondering whether you were going to be like Fénélon's hero or Homer's."

Eric stared at his companion in no little surprise. "This is the most pedantic or the

most learned Viking that ever was!" he thought; and to cap what he thought her pedantry, he said, "Well, I will not say I likened you to the blue-eyed Pallas, who should have come to be my guide, for it happened that it was just then I was thinking you were like Hilda, the daughter of Sigurd, as she sailed with the golden bowl to the whirlpool of . . . I forget the name."

"What!" said the girl, flushing with sudden pleasure, "do you know about Hilda and the Knight of Lofoden? I am so glad. I should never have thought you would have cared for the old Eddas."

"It is less strange than that a young lady in Northray should have read Homer, and know about the adventures of Ulysses."

"That is not odd at all; for we read the 'Iliad' and the 'Odyssey' to my father every night. He is blind, you know."

"And you understand Greek?" asked Eric Ericssen, with a smile of incredulity.

"Oh yes," said the girl.

"And Latin?"

"Yes. Miriam knows it better than I do?"

"And what do you read in Latin?"

"We read the *Old Fathers* to my father, on

Sundays; but we don't much like them—Saint Augustine, Lactantius, and so on, you know. Then we read Virgil and Horace. I like Horace, but I don't care much for Virgil; he exaggerates so. I never could get to like him, but Miriam does; then she knows Latin so much better than I do, and French too."

"Of course, you find French more amusing than Greek and Latin?"

"Not at all. I think it a very stupid language. We have got 'Télémaque,' and 'Le Grand Cyrus,' by Mademoiselle Scudéry, and we can hardly read either, they are so tiresome."

"And novels generally—I suppose you hardly condescend to read them?" asked the young man, still puzzled to know whether his cousin was excessively simple or excessively pretentious.

"Oh, indeed we do," she said, laughing; "we read all the novels we can get hold of, but we have very few. 'Theagenes and Charicleia,' the 'Doris and Chloe' of Longus, and one or two more; but these two are the most amusing."

Eric Ericssen laughed outright, so utterly

unaccountable did it seem to him that a young lady of twenty should think French literature tedious, and take to the more abstruse Greek classics for light reading.

"I thought myself very clever for taking a First Class in Classics at Oxford," he said, "and yet, do you know, I never read a word of Heliodorus in my life, and have been fearfully puzzled over the hard words in Longus. How did you manage to become so learned?"

"My father says we are very ignorant compared with most young ladies, but Greek and Latin he has been teaching us ever since we were children, and we should be dunces indeed not to know them!"

"And French? I notice that your accent is very good."

"Is it?" said the girl. "I am glad of that. Julie, our maid, who came here with our mother, taught us, and we generally talk to her in French. If you think my French good, you will think Miriam's wonderful."

"She is your elder sister, I suppose?"

"No, I am the eldest."

"And is she as . . . is she pretty?"

"She is quite beautiful!" said Miss Ericsson, with immense emphasis.

"Do you know," said the girl, presently, "that we are almost standing still? There is a current against us here, and the wind is so strong that we have hardly gone fifty yards since we left the cutter. Can you row?"

The young man smiled as he got up. A man who has rowed stroke of his college eight for two years is almost justified in being taken aback by such a question.

"I have not read Heliodorus in the original," he said, laughing, "but at least I know how to row!"

He took the boy's oar from him, and used it so effectually that the two others, labouring at the same oar, could scarcely hold their own against him.

"Indeed you do row well," said the girl, pleased that her English cousin should seem so skilled in the eyes of the islanders who were now assembled on the beach.

In a few minutes the keel of the boat had grated over the bar of the stream, and was in the smooth water of the river pool.

Some twenty or thirty fishermen greeted the new comer heartily but respectfully, and his cousin said, "We will walk up to the

Manse." The young lady's father was the clergyman of the parish and island, and indeed the only educated person within some score of miles, for Northray lies far away from the nearest of the Shetland group. "My sister strained her ankle yesterday on Roorra Head, and my father does not care to go about unless there is one of us to guide him."

She led him along a path through a green meadow, past a wicket into an orchard, thickly planted with diminutive apple and pear trees—for in these remote northern islands, trees and shrubs, horses, cattle and sheep, every living thing indeed, except man himself, are undersized and growth-stunted; they passed along a narrow avenue where the branches of the trees were interlaced and pleached overhead, and presently they came in sight of the Manse, the largest house in Northray, square, stone-built, weather-beaten, and solid looking; and in front of it garden beds set with such hardy flowering plants as will open to the sun under these northern skies. The trim, well-kept paths, the rich, velvety turf, harmonized well with the lichen-tinted house; and to look upon these things, to lose the tumult of tumbling waves in his ears, and to

smell the sweet odours wafted from a neighbouring clover field, instead of the brine-charged air he had breathed for so many days, to Eric Ericssen seemed exquisitely delicious.

CHAPTER II.

THE MINISTER OF NORTHRAY.

AN old man with quite white hair sat on a stone bench near the house. He rose at the sound of approaching footsteps, and then Eric Ericssen perceived by the extension of his hand that he was blind.

“My father,” said Miss Ericssen, and taking her cousin’s hand in hers, she led him to the old man and placed it in his.

“Sir,” she said to her father, very seriously—there is always something serious and earnest in true hospitality—“this is our guest, Eric Ericssen.”

The elder Mr. Ericssen, the clergyman of Northray, was a hale, fresh-coloured, tall, somewhat portly man of past sixty years of age. His eyes, struck with incurable blindness, yet preserved their clearness, and his

face had not the painful blank look of many blind men, for his loss of sight was caused, like Milton's, by the *thick drop serene* which leaves the eye—

“Clear,
“To outward view of blemish or of spot.”

If Mr. Ericssen had not, like the Puritan poet, sacrificed his eyesight to labours in his country's cause, he had at least lost it in the noble cause of letters. He was a classic scholar such as there have been few in the world. A man with a wide acquaintance with the ideas as well as the words of the ancients—the lineal successor of the Scaligers, the Casaubons, and the Bentleys—with a contempt for the modern hair-splitting school of verbal criticism.

Of the ancient blood of the island, Mr. Ericssen, himself a clergyman's son, had graduated in an English university, and had subsequently travelled over Europe as a tutor with a young nobleman, a friend whom he had made at college. In this friend's yacht he had visited the Baltic and the ports of the Northern sea. His scholarship, his acquaintance with Scandinavian literature, and perhaps the sympathy derived from identic

lineage, had won him the good-will of the Lutheran minister of a parish near a Norwegian Fiord, on which his friend's yacht had passed a whole summer; and his good looks and pleasant manners had gained him the love of the minister's daughter. Installed in the small living of Northray many years afterwards, he had redeemed his plighted troth with the Norwegian maiden, and had brought her to a home not dissimilar to her own island habitation among the Fiords, and she had found herself among a people akin to her own kith in Norway. She had died at the birth of her second daughter, Miriam, and the two children were brought up by the care of a French servant, who transferred her devotion to her Norwegian mistress to her mistress's children.

Mr. Ericssen was unable to afford his children any education beyond what his own acquirements could supply. He taught them Latin, and when they showed themselves apt linguists, he taught them to read and appreciate the Greek classics. When his blindness fell upon him they could return tenfold his labour bestowed upon them by reading his beloved authors to him, themselves loving them as their father did.

Mademoiselle Julie, the old Frenchwoman, had given them a fluent knowledge of French and an excellent accent. She taught them to read the pseudo-classical tragedies of Racine and Corneille, and knowing the originals of which they are bad copies, they laughed at the French playwrights' bombast and pomposity. Their father was an excellent musician, and they learned to join him in trios of Beethoven and Bach without once dreaming that these composers' music was abstruse or difficult.

Thus did it happen that two girls born and bred in a far-off island of a remote ocean had learnt more, even in the way of mere accomplishments, than is often acquired by young ladies with the best opportunities and the most lavish expenditure upon them ; and thus it was that the young Oxonian, fresh from his successful struggle for the highest University honours, was startled to find a simple country girl more familiar with the abstruse authors of antiquity than himself ; and moreover, he soon learnt to see that no particle of ostentation had mingled with his cousin's talk of classical subjects. The ideas and the words of the ancient writers, dealing as they did with

idyllic themes belonging to a simple age, were indeed kindred and congenial to the simple lives and inartificial surroundings of these northern maidens, and mingled naturally and unconsciously with their daily avocations and conversation; for after all we mistake if we think that a grand literature must needs be the outgrowth of a complicated society. The grandest that the world has known was created by men of no less simple lives than those led by the men and women of Northray; husbandmen, like the people of old Greece; seafarers, fishermen, and tillers of a rude unfertile soil.

Mr. Ericssen welcomed his brother's son very warmly. He had not met that brother for forty years, and the son never before. He himself had gained at the same University the same great distinction which his nephew now had won a generation later. He was pleased to find the scholarly ability hereditary in the family. He plied the young man with questions, and delighted in the remembrances of his youth which his answers recalled.

"Father," said Ruth Ericssen, "Miriam will be impatient to see our cousin. She cannot move from the sofa."

CHAPTER III.

MIRIAM.

THEY passed from the garden to the sitting-room of the house—a large, low-ceiled room, with lofty book-shelves mainly filled with heavy folios; four or five Marc Antonio engravings and Dürer etchings on the walls in heavy black frames (for the minister possessed a true taste in art as well as in books, and good prints form the poor man's picture gallery); a faded, dark red paper, black leather-covered chairs, a large central table covered with green cloth, not unspotted with ink and strewn with books and sheets of manuscript; greenish window hangings, and a Turkey carpet worn down to the warp, made up an ideal scholar's room.

Lying on a sofa near the window was a young girl with a face more lovely than any

that Eric Ericssen had imagined in his wildest dreamings. She bore a striking resemblance to her sister—the same pale, transparent, shell-like skin, the same clear blue eyes, the same exquisiteness and purity in the lines of the mouth, expressing in them that which the genius of the old painters has stamped on the faces of their pictured angels—a look between tenderness and nobility. There were between the two sisters differences rather of degree than of kind. In Ruth the hair was of a pale undecided golden; in her sister a deeper colouring brought it almost to a shade of auburn. The lines of face and figure were somewhat fuller in the younger sister; and though Ruth was the taller of the two, and two years the elder born, her more slender form, her rather thinner face, and a certain indescribable look of directness and simplicity in its expression, would have led an uninformed person to pronounce her the younger of the two sisters.

“Children,” said Mr. Ericssen, after the greetings were done with, “tell me what your cousin is like. Is he of our race—fair and blue-eyed, like a true child of the North?”

The younger sister laughed.

"No, father," said Ruth, gravely, "he is not like our people. He is tall, but his eyes and his hair are dark."

"Your father was darker skinned than the rest of us," said the old gentleman to his guest, "and perhaps your mother, being a Frenchwoman, is dark complexioned?"

"Yes," said his nephew, "she is of Provençal race, and has black hair and dark eyes."

"I wish I could look upon your face," he said, seriously, "my soul yearns towards you, Eric, even as Joseph's towards his best-loved brother; and as he could not be discovered to Benjamin, so does the visitation of the Most High part me, too, somewhat from the son of my brother." He checked himself, and said, smiling, "But it is not for me, blessed so bountifully as I am, to repine at the one light burthen I bear, or to make you sad by querulousness. Now, children, use your eyes for me, and describe your cousin, so that I may feel I know him well. My brother had an open face, and his eyes had a bold, honest look in them."

"Yes, father," said Ruth, "our cousin has that look too."

"I was sure of it," said the old man, "for I get to catch the expression on the face in the tone of the voice; and I remember your father was the best cragsman, and had the surest foot and the strongest arm, in all the islands."

Eric Ericssen was too modest to recount his prowess on the river and in the cricket-field in proof that he had not degenerated, but his cousin spoke for him.

"He can row as well as the best of our men," she said, "and just now he leapt from the cutter's deck right into the boat alongside, though it was dancing up and down like a cork on the waves. Old John Lang said it was well done."

"Very good," said the minister, "our island folk will like you if you can do these things. Now, children, one more thing I want to know. Your uncle was the best-looking man in the islands; is your cousin like him in that?"

The two girls were silent. Their father smiled, and Eric Ericssen got very near blushing.

"Won't you speak," said Mr. Ericssen. "Then I must conclude that my nephew has not inherited everything from his father."

"Father," said Ruth, "my cousin is very handsome indeed."

Eric Ericssen was somewhat confused, the minister smiled, and presently after a grave look passed over his face. Ruth looked distressed, and her sister laughed outright. She said, speaking in French, and below the tone which caught her father's ear—

"Ma chère, ces choses ne se disent pas."

"Well," said Ruth, in the same lower tone, "it is true, and how is my father to know unless we tell him?"

Miriam laughed again, but her sister blushed crimson to the roots of her hair.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FAMILY AT THE MANSE.

It will be difficult to persuade some of our readers that the lives of two young girls, spending all their days in so remote a place as Northray, without any society of their own rank, and never by any chance catching any but the faintest murmur of the tumult of the great outer world—it is not easy to show that their lives were still happy and contented ones, which on the whole they were. No young, healthy and energetic mind, indeed, but feels at times vague aspirations for an enlarged sphere of existence, and a longing for actual contact with and bodily perception of things which have only reached it indirectly, but the strength of these longings is proportionate rather to the degree in which

the actual life is unfulfilled than to the energy and activity of the mind itself.

From their infancy, these girls had got to feel that the well-being of others was dependent upon themselves. To the elder of the two, her sister (though but two years younger than herself), in her motherless isolation, had appealed as all that is helpless appeals to a true woman's love and compassion. The devotion that Ruth felt for her sister was curiously mingled with an enthusiastic admiration for her beauty and her talents. Again, in the early childhood of the two daughters, complete blindness had fallen on their father, and, over and above the care of himself which his affliction called for, they began from that time to share with him in earnest the heavy burthen—not irksome to cheerful bearers of it—of the care of a large parish, and in some sort the paternal government of a singularly improvident population. Not only the settlement of legal and family disputes was deferred to the minister's judgment, but his wisdom was appealed to and his advice accepted in all points where the material interests of the islanders were concerned, and the quick observation and sharp

wits of his daughters were absolutely indispensable to him in all such matters. So had these two girls' lives come to be quite full of seriousness to them. They were incessantly, and to them it seemed pleasantly, occupied, not only in caring for the personal requirements of their father's parishioners, but in regarding, with anxious and with watchful eyes, the mutations of nature and of nature's creatures, for upon such mutations the actual existence of dwellers in these wild sea islands is dependent.

They had learnt from their father, and by their own experience, to calculate, from the most trifling changes in the flight, the cries, or the assemblages of the sea birds, the movements of the great migratory fish shoals which form the chief food of the island people; they could detect by the almost imperceptible ruffling of the distant sea the approach of the fish; they knew the winds that brought the welcome flights of wildfowl to the inland lochs; they gathered the warning presage of frost and snow in the long strings of migrants from the arctic regions; and it was their observation of the cliff birds which guided the fowlers as to when to seek for eggs and down, and when to

leave the parent birds in peace. Thus was their watchful intelligence constantly exerted to ward off starvation from a thriftless population.

Their cousin had now been a week at North-ray Manse, and was getting used to a mode of life which is peculiarly delightful to a young man possessed of his liking for outdoor pursuits. He delighted in sport, and sport in Northray had nothing in it of that element of unnecessary and purposeless destruction of life which is the drawback to the enjoyment of it in more civilized countries. Here the pursuit was delightful, and the result useful—both means and end were desirable. If he landed a salmon in the river pool, it was a boon to some poor family; if he shot a seal off the rocks, the islanders rejoiced with him at the destruction of an animal whose presence scared the shoals of fish from their coast, and whose oil would furnish one or two families with light for a whole winter; if he half filled his boat with salmon trout or codling, they saw the common stock of food on the island sensibly increased.

Sometimes he was accompanied in his expe-

ditions by sea or land by both his cousins, but oftener by one alone, for they took it in turn to stay at home with their father. He found them pleasant companions, as keen as himself in their delight in the sights and sounds of nature, with memories curiously stored as well with the realities of an actual world as with what in their vivid fancies had come to seem almost as substantial—the myths of ancient Scandinavia and of ancient Greece; for these legendary pagan heroes and heroines had got to be embodiments in their minds, and to hold the places that their fellow men and women occupy in the minds of persons less versed in books, and more acquainted with living human beings. They condemned and admired, and loved, hated or despised, these unreal personages with an intensity that might have seemed childish to those gifted with a less fervid fancy than themselves, whose minds had less of their peculiar cultivation, or whose education had been among a people and among surroundings less unsophisticated and less simple.

Eric wondered to hear them gravely discuss the characters of the heroes of Homer's poems, detect their unconscious meanness, and set

the northern type of demigod far above the godlike Hector and Achilles of Grecian song.

As he talked with them he began to see how utterly dissimilar were the two girls, of whom his first impression had been that they were as like in character as in face and figure, and that the same occupations must necessarily have developed in them identical tastes and identical dispositions.

He had immediately perceived that the superiority in cleverness lay with the younger sister. She was quicker, and both more receptive and more suggestive of the small ideas which form the staple of daily conversation. Eric Ericssen found that unconsciously she led the talk, and that he himself in speaking spoke chiefly to her. The elder was as cheerful, but the younger was the more animated—and yet there was but a shade of difference in all this; both were animated, neither of them had any of the common constraint or of the silly shyness of young people, in most cases another name for self-consciousness and conceit which fears to commit itself. Both were outspoken; both were pleasant faces to look upon; but the darker and more lustrous eyes, and brighter and deeper colour-

ing of the younger sister, certainly attracted the attention of the young man more strongly than did her sister, whose features and whose figure were to the full as beautiful, if the form and colouring were less striking to a first beholder.

In the evenings they would join in an instrumental quartet of one of the olden composers; or they talked—the minister questioning his nephew as to his Oxford life. He was editing a classical work, and he would have his opinion; he would criticise the criticism of the last German or French commentator; Eric would read aloud to him; and one evening he asked his cousins to let him hear them read in Greek or Latin, having never, as he told them, heard a lady pronounce a word in either of those languages.

Miriam chose from the *Æneid* of Virgil the well-known passage where the poet rises high above his own high level to describe the despair of the abandoned Carthaginian queen. Miriam read with an ease, a precision, and a grace which quite astonished Eric, who came from where these qualities are little cultivated. She did not render the declamatory passages with all their force, for in truth their rhetoric

is somewhat overcharged, but she read with a fluency and a good taste that made it a real pleasure to him to listen to her.

Then Ruth read. At her cousin's own suggestion, she opened the "Prometheus Bound"—the grandest tragedy that human brain ever wrought. It was Eric's fancy to give her this drama to read, of all others most unlikely to suit a girlish taste—the hopeless struggle of an inexorable, unbending human will, against divine might as inexorable and as unbending.

Ruth began to read, correctly indeed, but she failed to give any of her sister's grace of articulation; leaning on her elbows over the book, she read in a low voice, and with something of the sing-song tone of a child repeating its lesson, and her cousin feared that his request had overtaxed her powers; but, as she went on, her voice lost the monotonous tone that had at first marked it. She insensibly began to clothe the great verses of the poet with something of their own ring and harmony; and when she came to that noble passage where the hero recounts the great services rendered by him to humanity, which had brought upon him the endless anger of the

gods and their cruel revenge upon him, and, with prophetic force, presages his final triumph and the great destiny of the human race—then she seemed to feel more and more of the fire and vigour of these glorious verses, a light gathered in her eyes, and her voice vibrated in its utterance of the strong, sounding lines of the Greek.

Eric Ericssen, noting all this, was moved to enthusiastic admiration of the girl who, he imagined, so to express, must have felt the grandeur and nobility of these great thoughts. An older and a more experienced person would have known that susceptibility of this sort is apt to be deceptive, and that to be moved to enthusiasm by a poet's artifice is by no means equivalent to thinking or doing greatly, or rightly.

CHAPTER V.

RUTH'S PROMISE.

It was a few weeks after Eric Ericssen's arrival at Northray that the two sisters had gone to the steep cliff of Rooru Head one morning at an early hour, and were scanning the horizon with a telescope for some signs of an expected shoal of fish. High up on the topmost peak of the rocky cliff they sat, and the level plains of ocean spread out below them. The reflection of a white cloud interrupted in places the uniform green, and a darker one here and there imparted a pure purple; and the long winding streaks where two currents met seemed to be paths and rivers on the solid surface of the ocean.

"When the sea is calm like this, it looks like a large grass field on which one could walk, does it not, Miriam?" said the elder sister.

Miriam quoted :—

“ And on the level brine
Sleek Panopé with all her sisters played.”

Then after a pause she said, “ Do you know, Ruth, I get half tired of all these fancies, which are all that fill our lives. I wish some of the realities would fall to my share sometimes. I could put up even with unhappiness. I want——” but she did not finish her sentence.

“ What do you wish for, Miriam ? ” said her sister, taking her hand.

She did not answer.

“ I don't quite know what I wish for, but it makes one unhappy to have any longing that one cannot define.”

“ I don't think you can be *very* unhappy,” said the elder sister ; and as she laughed, Miriam's frown relaxed a little. “ Look,” said Ruth, “ there is Eric Ericssen going to fish in the sea-pool.”

They could see down into the little river valley with its grassy fields, and the grey Manse half hidden by its surrounding fruit-trees. The young man, accompanied by the boatman, was standing near the deeper water at the pool head with a fish spear in his hand,

while his companion proceeded with a long pole to frighten the fish from their lurking places among the rocks below.

As the girls watched their cousin's movements, they saw him once or twice half raise his arm to strike, as a fish of inferior size, or in an unfavourable position, passed beneath him. At last he lifted his right arm higher in the air, and darted the long harpoon into the depths of the pool. In another moment he had recovered it, and as he drew it from the water, the bright scales of a large salmon glanced in the sunlight.

"Miriam, do you recollect how Hirdza wounded the sea-maiden with his fishing-spear, and then fell in love with her as she lay bleeding to death on the shore?"

"That is only another fancy," said Miriam; "no one ever falls in love with any one on this island. The sea-maiden would have got her wound and nothing to make up for it, if she had been in that pool!"

"Do you think our cousin so insensible?" said Ruth.

"Oh," said Miriam, answering her sister's banter with perfect gravity, "remember there was enchantment in the story of Hirdza.

The sea-nymph was a fairy, and laid a spell on the man who had wounded her. If she had not bewitched him into loving her, she would have had to die of her wound, you know."

Ruth smiled. "Do you think that the days of enchantment are over, and that you could not bewitch any one whom you chose, Miriam?"

She looked admiringly at the young girl's lovely face. Miriam's features brightened into a smile, but presently she looked grave again.

"You always say these things of me, and yet every one always ends by thinking more of you than of me. Do you remember Eric Sindal when he came here last summer? You were always saying he liked me so much, and yet he had not been here a week before he confided to me that he had fallen in love with you."

"Eric Sindal was a foolish boy who did not know his own mind. He would not have ventured to say so seriously to me—he knew I should have laughed at him."

"He was *not* a boy, and he was not foolish. I am quite sure he was in earnest. Ah! Ruth, you talk of enchantment; it is you who know how to use it! You have bewitched him."

Ruth looked at her sister with pitiful eyes. It was true enough, this story about Eric Sindal, their young Norwegian cousin, who, paying them a summer visit, had strangely, as it seemed to her, fallen away from his fealty to Miriam, and had been attracted by herself. It was difficult to administer any consolation for an injury of this palpable kind, and she said nothing.

"How did you manage it?" asked Miriam, with childish directness; "you have some secret, I know."

Ruth shook her head, and assured her she was talking nonsense.

"I know it will be the same with Eric Ericssen, and I shall watch you."

Ruth looked keenly at her sister. "You do not—care for him, do you, Miriam? Tell me, dearest," she urged, seeing that her sister turned away her head.

"What does it matter," said Miriam, impatiently, "whether I do or do not? He will never think about me. You know you can make him like you better. You will begin your arts presently," she said, disdainfully, "when you see it will wound me that you should gain him."

Ruth took her sister's hand. "Never, my own dearest Miriam. Do not think or speak like this of me. Who loves you if I do not? and how can I be happy if you are not happy?"

"Will you promise?" said Miriam, smiling through her tears.

"Of course I will!" said Ruth, laughing. "I will promise anything and do anything to see you happy."

"Promise, then, not to take him from me as you did Eric Sindal."

"I promise," said Ruth, laughing.

Eric Ericssen, leaning on his fish-spear, surveyed the broad flank, iridescent with green, silvery and purple hues, of the salmon as it lay on the grass by the pool side. The old fisherman stood by.

"I am half sorry I killed the poor devil, John," said the young man; "he was full of life and enjoyment a minute ago; what business have I to go and stick a spear through his head, and put an end to it all?"

"Lord! sir," said the old fisherman, "it's the best day's work that will be done this day in Northray. This fish will run up to twenty-

two or twenty-four pounds in weight. Six pounds of him will do for the Manse, and the minister will send as much again to Jessie Nixon, who hasn't had a bit of anything but potatoes or meal in her pot for a month—and she a widow with six children—and the rest will go to others in the village who want it nearly as badly; so you see, sir, it's a real good deed you've done."

"Very true, so far as it goes, John, but all the same it's hard to kill the poor beast, and stop all his fun."

"I don't see it, Master Eric," said the old man, very seriously, for nothing delights one of these seafarers so much as to entangle his mind in some sort of a disputation; "the reasoning of it is this, sir. This fish was bred in this river, and since he was as long as my finger he has been helping himself to some other live creature; first it was some speck of a water insect, then a fly or a worm, then perhaps one of his own kind, smaller than himself; then he'd go down to the sea and lay hold of a herring, and like the taste of him, and take his fill among the shoals and get stronger on the good feeding, and then make bold with a flounder or a mullet or a

codling, and grow up on it all to be a full-sized salmon. Now, sir," said the old man, with a quaint and not intentionally irreverent clenching of his argument, "as he's been a victualing so free at God Almighty's dinner-table, he's no call to complain if some other of God's creatures helps himself to him; and all I can say, sir, is, that this salmon has been in luck, for he might have had a bite taken out of him by a seal or an otter—as many a fish does have—and he might have lingered and died miserably; but he gets a stroke of the *grains* mercifully right through his head, and all his troubles are over in a minute."

"John," said Eric, quite impressed, "this is simply philosophy."

"I'd rather you'd call it d——d nonsense at once, Master Eric," said John, who did not understand or approve of the longer word.

I will take this opportunity of observing that no purer English is spoken in the United Kingdom than that in use by the common people of the Shetland Islands; the reason being that English was taught to the inhabitants some few hundred years ago, and taught by educated people. No provincialisms have had time to grow up. It is not merely good

English, but English of a pure, quaint, and genuine sort, taught to them before the stream of the language was enriched—or muddied—by the admixture of foreign words and idioms.

The old man grasped the heavy fish by the thin part above the tail, and prepared to carry it to the minister's house.

"There are your two cousins up on Roora Head. I warrant Miss Ruth will be glad enough to have the fish to send into the village!"

Eric Ericssen was straining his eyes to catch a sight of the two girls. "Is that them that I see up there, on that point of rock where the cliff is like a wall below them down to the sea? They look like two gannets lighted, up there in their white dresses. How could they have managed to get so high?"

"Lord bless you, sir! those two young ladies can climb anywhere you could go. They would leave me behind in no time!"

"Is it safe for them there?"

"Never fear! You don't know Miss Ruth yet, sir. She'll risk herself in any wild place, but I do believe she'd as lief jump off that ledge there into the sea as bring Miss Miriam into danger."

"She is very fond of her sister, I can see!"

"Fond isn't the word, sir." The old fisherman worked his tanned and wrinkled face into a confidential expression, and he lowered his voice and growled out his words like distant thunder, "Fond is not the word, Master Eric; it's my belief that if she thought her sister would get any good of it, Miss Ruth would drain out her blood to the last drop; she would indeed, sir—God bless her pretty face!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE NORTHERN SEAS.

IN order that their guest might see some of the wonders of cliff, rock, and cavern, it was arranged to make an expedition by boat. They would land on the north side of the island, the minister would take the opportunity of visiting some of his outlying parishioners, and they would then walk back across the island homewards.

"You will see," said old Mr. Ericssen, "how small our kingdom is—a stroll through a few green fields, and we shall be here again."

He explained how all that was grand in the scenery of Northray was its rim of tall sea-rock; the interior was low-lying and comparatively tame; a few grassy hills, here and there a little lake, and brooks flowing

through narrow valleys, which joined to form the one river that reached the sea near the Manse.

It was a lovely still day, and sky and sea were of the same uniform soft misty blue, only that here and there the sea caught faint reflections of the small grey clouds that hung motionless high up aloft, and it gave back inverted images, as distinct as the originals, of the tall yellow cliffs, topped in places with a carpeting of bright green turf, by whose bases they were passing.

There was not a breath of wind, and from the fires of the seaweed-burners the thin smoke columns curled in ascending spirals straight up till their ending was lost in the upward distance.

Four strong rowers carried them swiftly on, and Eric and his cousin Miriam, sitting in the fore part of the boat together, watched for some time in silence the sharp prow cut into the still surface, and curiously disturb and confuse with its ripple the landscape pictured in the water. When the boat stopped in some quiet cove, or by the foot of some taller cliff, Miriam showed him how marvellously pure and clear was the water. Looking over the

side of the boat, the eye could easily reach down into the watery depths thirty or forty feet below them. Hanging half-way down floated great tangles of brown, green, and red seaweed, slowly swaying and waving in the subaqueous currents with eel-like motion, and with a strange imitation of the effects of a breeze on tree-branches; and the sunlight, falling through the transparent medium, trembled on the sea foliage as luminously as on the leaves and branches of trees in a summer landscape.

On the bottom was a flooring of glittering silver sand, on which they could see the living sea-shells lying, and crabs and crayfish of all sizes crawled, fed, and fought. Miriam dropped a white pebble into the water, and they watched its slow descent, and saw how the great fish dashed at it from their lurking-places among the weeds, then, with a sweep of their broad tail-fins, turned back, disappointed as they neared it, into their former retreats.

"If one could only breathe under water," said Eric, "what a palace one might build for oneself down there!"

"Oh!" said Miriam, with a shudder, "I

should be afraid of the crabs biting me. Look at their enormous claws ! ”

“ We should have to appeal to Neptune if they bit us,” said Eric ; “ and if that didn’t stop them, we would cook a few for dinner every day till they learnt better manners. Ruth, will you come and live with us down below ? ”

“ No,” said Ruth, smiling ; “ I think it would be too damp.”

“ Oh, not at all ! It’s only damp at the first going off.”

“ No,” said Miriam ; “ one gets thoroughly wet through at starting, and then one does not mind it a bit.”

But Ruth to-day would not help them to talk nonsense. She was out of spirits, and Miriam, noticing an unusual reserve about her, connected it with the keeping of the promise she had exacted from her sister the day before. She was ashamed. She thought she had done somewhat ungenerously in calling upon Ruth—counting, as she felt she confidently could, on her sister’s well-tried devotion to herself—for such a singular undertaking on her part. Miriam was, in truth, beginning now to consider that it had been

a superfluous precaution in her to have exacted any promise; and this seeming so to her, her conscience began to smite her with quite a keen feeling of self-reproach. She half smiled to herself as she recollected what had passed between herself and Ruth; but it was a smile of that kind that has in its origin some bitterness—a smile that resulted partly from a pleasurable self-satisfaction, which told her it was silly in her to have been so apprehensive of Ruth's influence, and partly of shame that she should have taken unnecessary advantage of her affection.

She glanced at Ruth, sitting silently by her father's side, and she looked with a self-reproachful expression, which Ruth divined in an instant, and there came to her an answering look from her, which spoke of such a strong, single, devoted love as went straight to the heart of the younger sister.

"What have I ever done to deserve such devotion?" was Miriam's unspoken thought. "Ruth," said she, "come and sit in my place, and let me come where you are."

She half rose in the enthusiasm of her good impulse, but by the time she had spoken she half hoped her offer might not be accepted.

Ruth smiled, shook her head, and they stayed as they were.

Miriam again looked hard at her sister's face, but she saw on it—though it struck her for a moment that it wore an unaccustomed paleness—no more than she had seen before. She was glad that she had a sister who was so fond of her, and who was always so unselfish, and she was a little sorry that she herself had gone out of her way to exact that unnecessary promise ; and then she let the whole thing go behind her memory, and she and Eric Ericssen sat side by side, looking sometimes at the sea and the cliffs, oftener at each other, and talking together in voices not pitched intentionally low, but yet which the noise and splash of the oars did not let reach the others sitting in the after part of the boat ; and Miriam thought that never before had the sea seemed so lovely, its green depths so translucent—never before had the ripple of the water against the boat sounded so musically in her ears, or the soft summer air hung round her so deliciously.

CHAPTER VII.

RUTH ERICSSSEN'S ETHICS.

SINCE it is my task to chronicle the thoughts and feelings of what have rudely been called *un-idea'd girls*, I will go so far as to say that Miss Ruth Ericssen's meditations, as she sat still and silent by her father, were by no means so agreeable as her sister's, and by a great deal more complicated. As she looked at her cousin in eager talk, and as her eye rested on the sweet contour of Miriam's face, and watched its changing tints, and the exquisite, shell-like purity of its colouring, a new and inexplicable feeling began to grow up within her. To her the sea had not to-day its usual charm; she did not once look down into its depths; the brilliancy of its surface was a glare that her eyes did not care to rest upon; and the calmness of that sunny after-

noon seemed to her oppressive in the extreme.

Ruth Ericssen had the advantage of having had excellent principles instilled into her from an early period. Our experience and our copy-books alike teach us what a great point this is. Her code of morals might be represented by the maxim which has been handed down to us from a remote antiquity, and which so admirably conveys everything that can be said on the subject in four words, that I hesitate to weaken or vulgarize them by translation:—" *Virtus est bona res.*"

She had very long ago come to the conclusion that goodness was the very best thing attainable. But morality is apt to evaporate in preaching. Principles are dead things in themselves; you may plant them with very little trouble, but it is the soil, and the light, and the watering that have to make them live. They must be more or less enthusiastically accepted, and, while they are growing, very carefully tended.

Ruth Ericssen, indeed, had a prodigious amount of enthusiasm—a little of it outspoken, but mostly latent. But we know what a short way enthusiasm goes—how it is

prodigal of fine sentiments, lavish of great promises, and how scanty, as a rule, of performance. Ruth had amused herself from her childhood with fancied noble deeds of self-sacrifice; she loved recitals of all sorts of brave actions, all kinds of self-devotion—to a friend, to a country, to an idea. To hear of such things gave her a glow of pleasure which nothing else did; that which she so much approved she, to some extent, practised. She felt a strong love for her father and her sister; but, in truth, this affection was a quite natural feeling, not by any means a virtue practised on principle; and she pleased herself by performing in daily life little acts of self-devotion, and in return for them she reaped a present reward—for her father, her sister, and her dependants held her, as we have seen, to be the tenderest and the most unselfish of daughters, of sisters, and of mistresses.

But, in truth, all this was but playing at carrying out great ideas. It is nothing to be devoted to others if we surrender little or nothing and gain much; it is easy to be unselfish if we are paid for our self-negation on the spot; but if it comes to having to part with our happiness before we can confer any

on others, then, indeed, there is something implied in acting on the *Virtus est bona res* principle: and to this pitch of excellence Ruth had had no occasion as yet to stretch her fine principles. She had never been required to be content with only the consciousness of her good actions, and, as our moral teachers say, to *Let virtue be its own reward*.

There are few things so amusing, and—from some points of view—so sad, in the great human comedy which is being performed all round us, as to see the constant shortcomings of performance as set against promise. There is a delicious flavour in the tragic rant of the Rolando in the first act, simply because we know that it will inevitably turn to the brag-gadocio of Bobadil before the curtain falls.

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. ERICSSSEN'S OPINIONS.

MR. ERICSSSEN, in the solitude of his northern home, had thought out the difficult problem of the education of women. It was a subject which never had had any particular attraction for him, any more than it has for most men, until he had found himself left a widower, with the charge of two young girls. He did not desire to evolve any brilliant and subversive theory on the subject, as clever men have done from time to time; for the results of the system he should follow would touch him so nearly that he was greatly fearful of failure. He was a shrewd man, a learned man, and an original thinker—a rare combination; and these were the views he struck out:—

"I will," he said, "withhold from my daughters no branch of human knowledge which they care to study and are competent to acquire. They shall be taught as a means to an end. Their memories shall be burthened as little as possible ; and their judgment, their fancy, and their imagination shall be exercised to the utmost. It shall be impressed upon them, and they shall learn from immediate experience, that knowledge is not only power but, what is far more important, that it is happiness. They shall learn to reverence what is good, to praise what is noble, and to love what is pure ; but, while their religion grants them liberty of conscience, and their country's laws liberty of thought, of word, and of action, they shall never learn from me that there is one code for men and another for women—that there are certain studies which women may not follow, certain books they may not read, certain subjects from which they must keep aloof. They shall never be oppressed by the slavish doctrine that, being professors of a free religion, and subjects of a free country, they are yet to be but half-sharers in that freedom because they were born women.

"I fully believe," said the minister, "that the Almighty has created the two sexes equal. I see that each has in some respects advantages over the other, but these severally so far compensate for each other, that they result in being equal. I see," he went on, arguing out the matter, "that men and women are endowed with like faculties, with like tendencies to good and evil, with like feelings and desires, with corresponding passions. If then it is right, as we know it is, to teach men to know good and evil, and to fortify their moral sense to follow the one and eschew the other, it must be wrong to rear up women in ignorance, which shall simulate innocence, and to refrain from letting them know the nature of the temptations and trials through which they must inevitably pass."

So theorizing, Mr. Ericssen had never put the smallest restraint on his daughters' acquisition of knowledge. He had given them free access to his library, which certainly did not sin on the side of light reading, and he gave them the knowledge of languages which was the key to the Greek, Latin, and French volumes on his bookshelves. The system so far worked smoothly. Homer's poems and

the Eddas were their earliest fairy tales, and as they grew older they were held entranced by stories told in immortal verse of the passion-struck Phædra, the sad Electra, the strange fate of Orestes, and the fearful doom of Prometheus.

If Mr. Ericssen had been asked what he had to say in defence of allowing two young girls to read of the doings of these heathen personages, impelled by the power of unreal gods, of the battles of men and heroes before Troy, or the wanderings and tribulations of the godlike Ulysses, he would have replied that, though Homer recounted the simpler actions and the more single motives of simpler times than these, his own knowledge of the world had not taught him that men's characters had changed, even though society had become more complicated; that as the study of mankind was the most important study that human beings could take up, he conceived the best possible form of education was to read books written by the man who, of all who had ever breathed, knew most, and told best, about men's ways, characters, and springs of action. Further, Mr. Ericssen would have contended that poems such as these, in which the doing of

brave deeds, the endurance of toil and hardship, and the contempt of danger were for ever being held up as most noble and worthy of imitation, were good reading for any man or woman whatsoever; and as to the *Odyssey*, he was never tired of expatiating upon its beauties, its interest, and its morality.

"Show me any romance of ancient or modern times," he would say, "where the characters are so finely drawn, so lifelike, and so consistent; where the descriptions of natural scenes are so impressive and so true; where the dialogues are so like the talk of living men and women, and so instinct with their feelings and their passions; where the incidents are so skilfully interwoven with the narrative, and the progress of the narrative itself so flowing, so various, and possessing so deep a human interest."

"I know in all literature," he would cry, in the warmth of his conviction, "no character so wide in its conception and so bold in its development as that of the hero, with his patient endurance of misfortune; no woman with the noble constancy in trouble, the calm and prudent evasion of guile, and the heroic devotion of Penelope; no termination to

any work of fiction so consonant with true morality as the final reunion of Ulysses and his wife."

Such would have been the peroration of Mr. Ericssen's sermon on education; such were the views of a scholar and a recluse on a subject upon which, it will generally be admitted, scholars and men secluded from the great world are singularly unfit to form an opinion.

Mr. Ericssen was too devoted a father to his two children to have bestowed this sort of education upon them from any but the narrowest desire to further their individual faculty of enjoyment, and to enable them to hold their own in the great struggle for existence, which is only another name for human life; but at times it amused him to justify his views on broader grounds.

"Increase the knowledge, refine the taste, and raise the moral standard of women," he would say, "and you infallibly raise men as well, for there cannot be a society where men are degraded while women hold a high position — it is impossible in the nature of things; whereas the converse too often may hold good, and women, as a class, may

be sunk so far below the standard of the other sex, as to lose both the power to rise, and the desire to be lifted to any higher sphere."

CHAPTER IX.

PLAY-ACTING.

THE boat with the minister and the three young people was approaching a part of the island where the character of the coast scenery was wilder, where the sea cliffs rose higher from the water, and where in places their bases were hollowed into caverns, through whose recesses the sea swell ebbcd and flowed.

"If you will not come to us, Ruth," said Eric, who was still sitting by her sister, "we will come to you," and he rose, and after him Miriam, and they took their seats by Mr. Ericsson and Ruth in the stern sheets of the boat.

The boatmen let the entering wave float them in through the narrow mouth of the cave, and then the men ran the boat on to a smooth beach of white sand, in a place where a pool

of water ran back into a narrow bay, whose termination was lost in the interior shadows of the cavern. The cliffs hereabout were of that sort of limestone which possesses tones of colouring passing from tawny yellow, through orange, to a dull red tint; and these colours in the unweathered interior of the rock seemed of purer and stronger hues.

The lofty, vaulted cavern roof imitated, with a thousand fantastic variations, the bosses, groins, and pendants of a Gothic dome, and the light passing through the clear, green waters of the sea-pool was refracted from it, and repeated its colour on the natural mouldings of the stone, in the way that in an old cathedral the sunlight entering by the painted windows tinges all the stonework with the colouring of gems.

Ruth Eriksen thrust forcibly back the bitter feeling that was rising within her and that was holding her silent, and made a strong effort to conceal her thoughts from her cousin and from the keener observation of her sister, and, as often happens, when such an effort is made, the excitement she sought to suppress was evidenced in the nervous restlessness of her movements and in an unreserve of speech

not habitual with her: but Miriam was too much occupied to be an observant witness. Over this day and on all that happened in it an enchantment hung; a dreamy feeling was on her, and, as with us in dreams, nothing seemed strange to her.

Ruth sprang from the boat, and walked along the interior strip of dry sand that margined the pool.

"Now," said she, "fancy this cave a temple of some god of the northern race, and me a priestess of the goddess Hel, to whom you have been praying for a propitious wind!"

She turned as she reached the interior of the cavern, and was lost for a moment among its gloomy recesses; then ascending a ridge of rocks that ran towards its centre, she advanced slowly to them out of the blackness of the shadow.

Eric Ericssen watched her curiously. She had removed from her shoulders a thin cloak of some dark material, and had taken off her small eagle-plumed hat. He saw the strange, coloured light transform her, as she stood there in her white dress, into, as he fancied, a being hardly of this earth—so magical a glamour did it cast upon the white drapery

of her dress, so luminous did it make her golden hair, and such tender warmth of colouring did it throw on her face.

She slowly lifted her arms as she reached the highest point of rock, herself standing where the strongest light fell, and, surrounded by the darkness, began to chant to some ancient solemn melody that came to her memory the forgotten Runic hymn to Hel, the grim goddess of the Dead. The sounds of her deep, mellow voice, rising from low to stronger tones, were reverberated by the resonant cavern roof and sides; the whole space grew filled with a wild, unearthly melody, whose notes thrilled and trembled in the air like the music of an organ. The boatmen were half scared at so weird a vision and the strange music of her song.

Eric's eyes were fascinated by her slow, leopard-like movements, and now as she stood still he was entranced and held in wondering admiration by the unconscious beauty of her attitude as she stood there, statue-like, with her tall, slender figure and uplifted arms. So, he thought, might have appeared to her votaries in the Sacred Cave the inspired priestess of the Pythian Apollo. He looked at

her face and he began to discern more clearly than he had done before its rare and perfect beauty. The beauty of exquisite features and shell-like tones he had always seen, but now he was strangely attracted by that which underlay it—a loveliness born of the soul within. Of this sort, thought Eric, was the beauty of those famous women of old who changed the fate of kingdoms, and worked whole generations to an enthusiasm of madness. Like hers he thought must have been—

“The face that launched a thousand ships
And burned the topless towers of Ilium.”

Ruth Ericssen caught in her cousin's face the look upon it of rapt and eager admiration, and her voice ceased, her arms dropped, and she came forward to them.

“You all look so frightened, that I was obliged to stop,” she said, laughing.

“Why, Ruth,” said her father, “I never knew you so excited before. Who taught you that hymn to the goddess Hel, and what was that solemn old air you sang it to?”

“It was,” said Ruth, “the chant of Pope Ambrose. I found it in an old music-book at home.”

Leaving the cavern, they walked through a tortuous upward passage which opened from the subterranean recess and led up to the little tableland of green turf forming the summit of the cliff. Then, by a gradual descending slope they reached the low, rounded, grassy hills, and flat meadow lands, divided by stone fences, which make up the interior landscape of the island.

Ruth had again fallen into silence. She had placed herself at her father's side, and guided him along the narrow rock path, and she still walked by him when they had reached the more open country. The minister was about to pay a visit to a parishioner, and would rejoin the others at the end of the valley they had just entered. Ruth sat down outside the house when they came to it, and pointed out to her sister and her cousin the spot where she would rejoin them with her father.

The house stood on a hill-side at the valley head, and Miriam and Eric Ericssen, walking down side by side, were at times visible from where Ruth Ericssen sat, at times lost to view as they wound in their descent round an occasional elevation of the ground, or an intercepting clump of bushes.

She watched their slow, sauntering progression. She could almost fancy she heard their words, so keen was her observation of their movements. She noticed that they looked not once at the opening views on either side of them, and if they stopped, it was at Miriam her cousin looked, and not upon the sea which, as Ruth knew, first showed at the spot they stood at through a vista of trees and distant cliff tops. Miriam's eyes were cast on the ground, but now and then raised to his face for an instant.

They went on, and again they stood still by a grove of feathering birches. He stooped to pick something from beneath the trees, it was too far for Ruth to see what, but she knew very well that the turf at that place by the birch-tree roots was blue with the flowers of harebells. He gave what he had gathered to his companion, and Ruth watched her take off her hat and put what she knew to be the blue flowers into her golden hair. She could divine the words of admiration he was breathing; she could in fancy see the conscious look on her sister's face, and hear her low reply.

"Ah God!" said Ruth, in her bitterness, and she covered her face with her hands and looked no more.

CHAPTER X.

THE PERILS OF THE SEA.

ON the following day there was great stir and excitement among the population of the village. From an early hour in the morning a large *school*, or herd of whales, had been observed playing off the island, and they were gradually nearing the bay. Such events were not common. At Northray whales were indeed not unfrequently seen, but they usually came singly, showed themselves but once or twice, and passed on rapidly to some distant and more congenial feeding-ground. Now they were here in great numbers, and they seemed in no haste to leave the island. There were traditions in Northray of such events as the embaying and the running aground of one or even more out of such a herd, and a single whale on shore was a prize, in oil and in

valuable whalebone, to enrich the islands for months.

The party from the Manse hurried down to the shore, and there Eric saw the grandest sight that had ever met his eyes: some forty or fifty whales of the largest size were visible at a distance of not a quarter of a mile from the land. Attracted probably by the presence of some favourite food—a shoal of fish or of the tiny sea animal known as “whale-food”—the *school* seemed every instant to be nearing the land. The day had been sunny, but was now overcast, and the sea was calm and, reflecting the dark leaden clouds above, seemed almost oily in its smoothness and its repose. There was a closeness and oppression, indicating that sort of electrical disturbance in the atmosphere which is well known to affect and to excite the animal kingdom.

It was no doubt some such cause which was inducing the gambols of the huge sea monsters on the surface of the ocean. At one moment one of them would from leap the water, and exhibit for a brief space the whole of his monstrous bulk in the air before he dived again, with a plunge that sent a cloud of spray high into the air. Again, another one would

uprear part of its body perpendicularly from the depths, and, before it sank again, stand for a moment like a tall sea rock, or one of those immense monolithic statues which rise from the level sands of the Egyptian deserts and awe the traveller with their bulk. Another whale would blow up a column of air and water, that rose like the vapour of some vast sea-engine ; or two or three in their unwieldy gambolings would rise together clear up into the air, and fall back on the water with a sudden, simultaneous plunge, whose sound reverberated like a thunderclap among the hills, and which caused a commotion in the waters like the eddy of a whirlpool, and a widening circle of waves that dashed into real breakers on the beach.

It was the object of the fishermen to drive the whales shorewards, but to do this required extreme caution. If they were in the least degree alarmed, they would infallibly make to sea and be lost to sight in a moment. Already a dozen boats had put out, and, making their way seaward, had got beyond the whales, and, at a prudent distance of nearly a mile, were slowly approaching the *school*. Old Lang, who had more experience of such events than any one

else, was despatching boat after boat, with instructions to extend the line already made and, forming a semicircle outside the herd, to endeavour to push them nearer and nearer to the bay. Presently all the boats but one had departed, and there was no one left to man this one.

"Master Eric, can you and I row out in Miss Ruth's boat? The line is too slack there," and he pointed to a part of the circle formed by the boats, where a wide space separated two of them.

Eric, with the old man's assistance, ran the light boat down the beach, and was preparing to push her into the sea.

"Miss Ruth will come and steer us," said the old man; "no one like her for bringing good luck!"

But the girl hung back in a way unusual to her, and whispered to her sister.

"We must have Miss Ruth or no one," said the old fisherman peremptorily; "Miss Miriam can't steer this boat."

"Go, my dear," said her father; and Ruth came forward, and, climbing into the stern-sheets of the boat as it stood high and dry on the beach, was, the minute after, launched

through the surf by Eric and the fisherman, who scrambled in from the water as soon as the boat had floated.

The oars had been muffled, in order that the fish should be undisturbed by the sound of rowing, for the old man insisted that the whales' hearing was as acute as a dog's; and the two men rowed cautiously and in silence past the herd, until they were in the line formed by the other boats. Then they rested upon their oars, and took off the pieces of cloth which had served to deaden their sound in the rowlocks.

"Miss Ruth, I beg your pardon if I offended you just now about Miss Miriam; but indeed she has no hand at all on a rudder."

The old man had been watching the girl's face, and had seen clearly on it the marks of some discontent, but he had not fully guessed its cause.

"You shouldn't have spoken like that, John; it is not true that I do this or anything better than my sister. It hurts her to hear such things said, and it hurts me still more."

"I beg your pardon, miss," said the old man, humbly; "God knows, I would rather do anything than offend you or yours."

The girl was still silent, and when Eric would have spoken gaily to her, as usual, she was constrained, and answered absently, and even curtly.

They waited an hour or more, rowing a stroke or two now and then, to keep up with the other boats towards any point that the whales showed signs of approaching.

Presently the old fisherman began to peer into the horizon. "I don't like the looks of the weather," he said; "I misdoubt but we shall have a change before noon."

As he spoke, a heavy drop of rain fell on the thwart of the boat, and presently the glassy surface of the sea was dotted here and there with water spots.

"If it comes on to rain, the fish will go down—they are on the move now;" and he pointed to the herd, which, having given over their gambols, lay lazily rolling their great sides on the surface of the water, now half above it, now nearly submerged. The heads of all of them were pointing to the eastward, and there began to be a slow progression of the herd in that direction.

The hitherto placid surface of the water now began to curl and roughen here and there

with puffs of wind, and as the raindrops grew scantier the wind freshened, till presently they could feel it blowing strong upon their faces.

“Up sail, and head them! It’s our only chance,” said the old man; and they stepped the mast and hoisted the heavy lug-sail. The wind was from the west, and carried them swiftly to the part of the sea to which the fish were now slowly swimming. The other boats, following their example, set sail likewise, and presently the whole flotilla was sailing in the same direction. As the wind began to blow with a more regular force, the whales mended their pace, and it soon became evident that they were not to be diverted from their purpose of reaching the open sea. They approached the line of boats, dived, and were seen no more.

In the meantime a strong breeze was getting up, and the sea was rising to it in the short, dangerous foam-topped waves, which are usual on a transition from a dead calm to a wind. The rest of the little fleet luffed round, and prepared to stand for the harbour, and Miss Ericssen was about to imitate them and bring the boat’s head to the wind, but the fisherman

prevented her. It would not be safe, he said, short-handed as they were, to attempt it in so angry a sea, and in the face of so strong a wind. The other boats were broad-beamed, and short in build, and would be round in a minute; theirs a long, low-lying craft, that would give them work to get head to wind at all, and might, he said, as likely as not, fill and founder in the act. So he advised that they should make for a sandy cove beyond the next headland, about ten miles away, and there run in their boat safely.

Almost as he finished speaking, his opinion was justified by the rising wind. It whistled through the cordage on the mast, and every now and then a wave, leaping higher than the others, brought its spray into the boat. To increase their speed, and outstrip the fast-following sea, the men shook out the whole of their sail to the freshening breeze, for as yet they had used but a part, that they might keep pace with their slower-sailing companions. Then they flew through the water, and the sharp, dividing bows cut the waves and dashed the water upwards on either side. The old fisherman kept his hand watchfully on the main-sheet, Miss Ericssen still held the

helm, and Eric sat crouched down in the fore part of the boat, ready to bear a hand on the halyards at a moment's notice. The boat rushed on, trembling with the rapidity of its course.

The two young people enjoyed the delight of the swift motion, and Eric, watching his companion's face, saw her growing excitement in her kindling eyes and rising colour.

Eric began to sing the glorious sea song of Allan Cunningham—

“ A wet sheet and a flowing sea,
A wind that follows fast,
And fills the white and rustling sail,
And bends the gallant mast!”

and John Lang joined in the refrain with a strong rough voice, that rose alike above the noise of wind and wave; but he shook his head when the song was done. “It's a risky business, Mr. Eric, in a bit of a boat like this. I don't like it, sir.”

Miss Ericssen laughed. Her spirits had returned, and she talked, and was as gay as Eric himself.

“That's Miss Ruth all over,” muttered the old man, half admiringly and half reprovably; “she fears neither wind nor devil, sir, and

is never so pleased as when she thinks there's a chance of going to the bottom!"

"And how do you know, John, that the bottom of the sea is not my real home? Are you sure that I did not come from the sea, and am not going back there some day?"

John did not quite know what to say to these queer fancies.

"Lord! miss, please to mind where you're steering to in this sea."

Ruth Ericssen rose to her feet, and, with her hand still grasping the rudder, said, in mock imperious tones:

"John Lang! If you venture to doubt that I am no earth-born maiden, but a true daughter of the sea, I give one turn to the helm, and down we all go together, fifty fathoms deep!"

Notwithstanding Ruth's jesting manner, there was mingling with her irony an excitability and a half-nervousness, which a keener student of womankind than Eric might have cared to scrutinize more closely.

"God bless you, Miss Ruth! have a care or you'll overset us. Please to sit down, now, that's a dear young lady!" said the old man, in beseeching tones.

Ruth laughed at his alarm, and took her seat quietly in the stern sheets. Of a sudden her mood changed again to a silent one, and presently she began, in her subdued contralto tones, hardly audible amid the furious lashing of the waves, to sing the old ballad of the Maid of Colonsay.

Eric abandoned his place at the halyards, and, coming nearer, listened to the sad verses of this sweetest of all the ballads of the Northern seas—listened so enrapt in the long-drawn wail of its melody that he failed to notice, when it was concluded, that the wind, with the suddenness which characterizes the approach of a thunderstorm, had again sunk almost to a calm. The sea, however, was still troubled, and the waves, no longer urged onward by the wind, but still in violent movement from its previous force, rose and fell with a perpendicular motion.

“Now,” said the fisherman, “if we are to save our lives, we must row past the head before the wind catches us again. If it shifts to the north and blows hard we shall be carried to sea, and if it comes from the south we must go on the rocks.”

The two men settled to the oars and rowed.

steadily for half an hour. It was hard work, for the unquiet sea often disappointed the rowers' hold of the water, and lifted their oar blades at one moment high in the air, and at another buried them deep under the waves.

Miss Eriessen again brought upon herself the reproof of the old fisherman by her levity and her failure to see the imminence of the risk. Her spirits seemed to rise higher and higher with the approach of danger, as if she herself had no personal concern in what might happen.

"Row, John," she cried, "or the wind will beat you yet. There! I see the waves already whitening in the south—and see there! that is a bad sign for you—look at the strings of cormorants coming in before the storm. Even they are afraid to face it. See! they are hiding in the caves!"

She laughed excitedly as she did before, then seriously she spoke to her cousin.

"Eric, is it not a shame for us to try and fly from a storm of wind like cowards? Let us get our sail up, turn the boat's head to the gale, and brave it out."

"By Jove! Ruth, you are right. There is no shirking the matter; we have made no way

at all this half-hour, and the headland seems further off than when we begun," and he tossed his oar into the boat. "John, can't we run straight on to the coast here when the wind comes, and get shelter somewhere?"

"We shall run on to the coast sure enough, Master Eric," said the old man, grimly, "and if we were sea-birds we might fly up to the rocks and get shelter in a cave; but being three Christians in a boat, our boat will be in pieces the size of a tooth-pick, and our bodies food for fishes two minutes after we touch that shore."

"Then we must hold our own against the wind."

"That is our only chance, sir; and if the storm is not too strong, we may, please God, ride it out."

He proceeded, with the quiet resolution of his class, to make all necessary preparations. The sail was taken in until it was not much wider than a pocket handkerchief. He himself took the rudder, and Ruth was directed to lie down at the bottom of the boat near the mast, with the double duty of attending to the halyards and of bailing out the water, should it come in. Eric was to hold the main

sheet and keep the boat as near the wind as its violence would allow.

They could now see the long advancing wall of sea foam raised by the coming storm, and in a moment it was upon them. Their preparations, well conceived, were in vain. The boat held her own against the first blast, but the second was stronger, and the third struck her bows simultaneously with a great wave which broke over her side and came inside in bucketsful. The impact of wind and water was too strong for the boat, and her head slewed round in spite of John Lang's utmost effort with the helm. She broached to and lay broadside on to the gale. The next wave would have swamped her, but the old man, too good a boatman not to see the certain destruction before him, wore the boat, and in an instant she was scudding before the tempest full upon the rock-bound coast that lay about a mile before them. They neared it with inconceivable rapidity. In a few moments the huge rocks frowned overhead, and they were straining their eyes for some opening through which they might thrust in their boat. There was none.

John Lang beckoned to the young man to

creep closer to him, and holding his mouth against Eric's ear, told him he was trying to steer the boat towards the mouth of a sea cavern which lay ahead of them; there was a line of rocks at its entrance that would hinder the boat of getting in, unless by chance a wave should happen to lift them over it. He bid Eric be prepared to leap upon the rocks when the boat should be dashed upon them, and to urge Miss Ericssen to get to the forepart of the boat and be ready to spring ashore and get clear of the breakers. It was, he said, the only chance of saving themselves.

There was no minute to lose, so rapidly were they being hurried upon the rocks. Crouching down to escape the force of the wind, Eric made his way to where his cousin was kneeling by the mast, and delivered his message to her. She was pale, and he thought at first it was from terror, and tears glistened in her eyes.

She seized his hands, and looking with a strange yearning look into his face, "Eric, I shall have killed you. You will die on this awful coast, and it was my mad folly that made you leave off rowing."

"We could never have reached the head-

land," and he laughed to reassure her. "Come, Ruth, we have a good chance still. You must get into the bows, and spring out and cling to the rocks, and I will help you to get beyond the reach of the waves."

There was no time to say a word more, for, as he spoke, they were in front of the cavern mouth, into which the breakers were rolling heavily. The boat dashed in, carried upon the crest of a lofty wave, but the reef caught the keel, and she turned sideways; the mast snapped with the shock, and sail and cordage went over the side. The retreating billow carried the boat back twenty yards to sea; again she was washed up by the next wave, being now quite at the mercy of the sea, and this time she struck the higher rocks on one side of the opening.

Miss Ericssen and her cousin leapt out as the boat touched the rocks for a moment, and the young man, grasping his cousin's hand, endeavoured to pull her beyond the reach of the waves, but a huge breaker separated them and washed them both high up and beyond the water's reach; the same wave carried the lightened boat, crushed and sinking, into the smooth water within the cave.

Eric Ericssen was comparatively unhurt, but when he rose to his feet he saw the young girl still lying upon her face on the spot where the water had left her.

“Ruth! Are you hurt?”—he raised her in an agony of fear—“are you hurt, dearest?”

She was insensible. A point of rock had struck her temple, and the blood slowly came from the wound. He staunched it with his handkerchief, and taking her tenderly in his arms, carried her, unconscious as she was, down a natural staircase in the cliff into the shelter of the cavern below. There, on a shelving bank of dry sand, he laid her down, while he and John Lang stood by in anxious expectation. Her face wore the pallor of death, and her hands were as cold as the water that dripped from them. Her heart had ceased to beat: her eyes were closed. Life had retreated.

A trickle of fresh water fell into the narrow pool, which, occupying half the cavern, receded from the sea along the subterranean rift in the rocks into unseen recesses, and Eric, holding his hands like a cup under the dripping water, dashed their contents upon his cousin's face. The shock revived her; her colour returned,

her eyes opened, and she drew a long breath. Then her brow contracted with pain, and she carried her left hand to her side.

"It hurts me here," she said, but she had but half recovered her consciousness and was speaking with no knowledge of where she was or whom she was addressing.

"It is very cold," she said presently, and she shivered.

"Ruth, dearest, are you better?"

She looked at him with at first vacant eyes, slowly recovering to a memory of the terrible scene they had gone through. When she saw her cousin and the old man by her it all came upon her at once. She raised herself suddenly and seized her cousin's arm—"Are you not hurt, Eric?" she cried.

"No, no! We are both quite right; but you?"

"Thank God!" she said, and as she spoke she sank back with a sigh of relief on the sand; and again the colour left her cheek, and she remained motionless and almost as senseless as at first.

The men wrung out their outer clothes and piled them over her; the sand was dry and still retained the heat of the morning sun

upon it, and the air of the cave itself felt warm to the two men, but a shiver ran every now and then through Ruth's frame.

So they remained for longer than an hour, unable to do more than watch the wounded girl, who still lay in a half unconscious swoon. Presently the fisherman touched Eric Ericssen on the shoulder and pointed towards the interior of the cave. Eric perceived two round, yellowish eyes in the blackness of the cavern's furthest recess; as his eyes got used to the want of light he dimly traced out the uncertain outline of some living form. The man expressed his alarm in the scared look upon his face.

"Oh, Master Eric! It's a terrible thing to see that devil's fowl staring on us!"

It was a cormorant, and the common people of the islands consider this weird-looking bird to be portentous of misfortune, and hold it of as evil omen as the peasants of other countries do the raven or the screech-owl. John Lang threw a stone towards the bird, but confiding probably in the security of its dark retreat, the cormorant did not stir, and sitting there motionless with its unblinking eyes fixed upon them, an active and ignorant fancy might

easily conclude that the presence of the weird, unearthly creature was bound up in, and that it was there to watch out, the consummation of some doomed and fatal event.

Ruth began to mutter confusedly, her mind evidently wandering far from the scene of the disaster. Eric heard her speak her sister's name and her father's, and then her face wore an inexpressibly soft expression as she murmured some broken sentence in which he could catch nothing but the sound of his own name.

"She is thinking of your namesake, young Eric Sindal, I'll be bound, poor child!" said John Lang.

Again she lay quiet for a very long time, and when she opened her eyes her consciousness had again returned, but her face was still pale, and her voice weaker. She asked for water, and Eric brought her some in his joined hands. She drank eagerly.

"Eric," she said, "it struck me here," and again her left hand was laid on her heart. "I cannot get over it."

"No, no! dear cousin; it is only that you are faint from loss of blood."

"Oh, Eric!" she said, "I am so fright-

ened. Let me hold your hand, and feel you are near me."

He took her cold and trembling hands tightly in his, and she fixed her eyes wistfully upon his face.

"I thought just now," she said, "I should be so glad to die; and see now what a coward I am!"

"Do not speak like this, Ruth. The storm is lessening now, and the people from the village are sure to be here soon to look for us."

"They will not find me alive, Eric. I have got my death-blow. Something struck me on the heart, and I feel it heavier and heavier, and colder and colder, every moment."

She held her eyes on his face, with the same continued expression of intensity; then, speaking in tones he could but just catch, "I want to say something to you alone, Eric."

The old man left them together, and she continued—

"I want to speak to you about Miriam before . . . before I die."

Then she waited, as though she found it difficult to shape her thoughts into words. Presently she drew her hands from his grasp of them, and said abruptly—

"I know that you care for Miriam. Do not mistake her she Eric, if you think that she does not like you, if you go away and do not tell her that she would break her heart. Now I have said it. Will you promise me? Will you promise to speak to her—to remember my last words—your cousin's last request to you?"

"Ruth, Ruth, you don't know what you are saying. You have been utterly mistaken from the first. It is not your sister that—that I care for; it is you, Ruth, yourself that I love. You, my own darling!"

He carried her hands to his lips, and kissed them eagerly. "Do not talk of dying, Ruth, dearest. It kills me to hear you say it!"

The girl groaned suddenly, and fell back heavily; a convulsive thrill passed through her body, and she lay for a moment stark and straight on the sand, then her limbs relaxed, and no further movement agitated them.

"John!" cried out Eric Ericssen in terror. "Look at her! Is it . . . my God, is it death?" and in the agony of his grief and horror a loud cry burst from his lips.

The cormorant, which had remained till now motionless on the edge of the pool,

startled at the voice which broke into the silence of the cavern, plunged into the water beneath him and disappeared, and the splash echoing loudly among the rocky recesses, roused from its hiding-place in some cleft of the roof a small white tern, which first skimmed with swift and noiseless wing the surface of the pool, then passed out through the cavern mouth into the open air, and winged its flight away across the dark and still storm-troubled waters of the ocean.

Eric, overpowered by the horror of what had happened, his senses benumbed with a hideous grief, watched with seared and tearless eyes the strange, wayward, flitting movement of the sea-bird into, as it seemed, infinite space, and his excited fancy saw in it an emblem of the departure into regions whither he could not follow of the bright, pure spirit of the only woman he had ever loved.

CHAPTER XI.

A SEA CHANGE.

It was a sad evening in Northray, the one following the storm. The people had searched along the cliffs and in the caves, knowing from evil experience whereabouts such a gale would be likely to cast up its victims; and coming upon the cave where the boat's occupants lay, they had borne on a litter to the Manse the lifeless body of Ruth Ericssen.

For long, slow miles the procession crept on, by hill and by dingle and by moss, and fording little sand-bedded rivers; gathering at every homestead some increment of mourners—men who followed the bearers in moody sadness, children with tearful faces, and women raising their voices from time to time in shrill lamenting cries. Their way lying over the crest of a hill whence a sight of the

village was to be obtained, their sorrowing got a keener edge to it as it came into the mourners' recollections that the loss to the blind old father was far greater than theirs of a kind friend, and that he was waiting in his blindness and his anxiety—waiting, as they could have told him, only to receive the body of a dead child.

Was she dead? No; but in a swoon which for the time counterfeited death. The soul was indeed in the body they were bearing along, and a latent life, though they well might doubt it. As the girl lay on the litter with upturned face, cold, pale, inert, insensible, pulseless and all but breathless, was the mind still busy, or was that, too, inert? If our fancy is but the more wakeful when our sleep is deepest, may it not be more active still when we are nearly sunk in the deepest sleep of all, and have not those who have lain between life and death sometimes recalled the strange wanderings of the soul as it all but escaped from the body? Where was Ruth's spirit now? Had it floated back to her child life, and was it busy with childish griefs and joys? Was it projected into the future, or could it dwell on nothing but the one great present fact that had come to

her in her last moments of consciousness—the knowledge that the man she loved in secret also loved her. Our wills are powerless in our dreams, and if Ruth shall consent to this love now and delight in it, her awakening will be but the more bitter, should she think that she ought in honour to reject it.

A week after this day the house was still hushed, and those who lived in it still stepped with caution and spoke under their breath. It was habit, not necessity, for Ruth Ericssen was well again. They had fanned the flame of life back, and it now burned bright and strong as ever. Her youth and her health sprang up again after succumbing for an instant, as a lusty young tree bent down by a storm grows up straight again and strong when the wind has gone by. But something now weighed on her mind and on her spirits; *they* did not recover. In truth the blow and shock to them had come long before—had come when she felt the love that had grown up in her for the man that she had thought was her sister's lover.

She had had fortitude enough to support this burthen and to make no sign. She had

been strengthened in her endurance by the belief that Eric was as devoted to Miriam as she to him; thus she had two reasons to give no token of her secret—loyalty to her sister and the utter futility of any action. So, doubly fortified in her resolve, she had suffered on, and already the suffering, though keen, was less intolerable in the very hopelessness of any relief from it; but now she had been undeceived. Eric had told her, and she was now of the freemasonry, and knew to what intensity of emotion his tones and his look testified that it was not her sister but her, Ruth, that he loved. The rich prize of this love it was now hers to stretch out her hand and take.

Why not? Was it not a free gift, a gift from heaven itself? Was she robbing Miriam of anything in taking it—would her sister be in any way the gainer should she hold her own hand? Certainly not, she honestly believed; for such people as Ruth, being inexperienced, cannot bring themselves to believe that there is any possible deviation of such a feeling as love; it is with them a passion, of which outward expression may indeed by a huge effort be repressed, but which is too strong and too direct and too simple to be diverted; and

should she condemn herself to a life-long poignancy of regret for her abnegation, an abnegation which should have for its object only to redeem a promise idly made to humour the childish whim of a petulant girl? Moreover, believing now that Eric loved her as she did him, could she force herself to the cruelty to him of denying a return of his love? This was a subtle and persuasive suggestion of her ingenuity. Though she might be cruel to herself, could she be cruel to the man towards whom her soul so yearned?

So it came to be that to her father and to her sister it was a strange thing that Ruth, her health and strength seemingly restored, sat or lay all day long silent, uncheerful, against her wont; her eyes fixed on vacancy, her hands lying listless and unoccupied, her mind for ever turning over the same round of argument.

Now, she would set aside all but her own love, and let the strong tide of her inclination drift her unresisting into a sea of happiness where she could let her fancies play with new, untried, unmeasured delights. Then, in a moment, she would in fancy see the sad, regretful eyes of Miriam fixed upon her, and

a gloom would come over the prospect. Then the vista of long, coming years, robbed for her of all their brightness by her own act, would seem absolutely insupportable, and the keenness of her impatience almost shaped itself into anger against Miriam—the cause of so much prospective unhappiness.

So was Ruth continually struggling between her new desires and her old devotion to Miriam—her love and, as she fancied, her honour; now resolved to be bound by no such shadowy scruple; now restrained by it; now almost wondering at its strength; now absolutely despising herself for respecting it.

She feared to speak to Eric; she would not leave her room, and Eric had not seen her since he had helped to carry her insensible into her father's house. If she should see him again in her present mood, if she should hear him plead his love and strengthen the strong advocacy of her own heart, could she fail to yield? So she kept aloof from her cousin.

Eric's first paroxysm of grief and despair had passed successively through the stages of anxious hope, intense relief, and exceeding gladness, as succeeding reports reached him

of Ruth's well-doing. Soon she was past all danger, and at last she was absolutely recovered. Then thoughts began to press upon him, which, in his anxiety, he had overlooked.

He began to ask himself what chance he had of winning her who had won his love. The very last words she had spoken to him were words uttered in the solemn conviction that she would never speak again, and they expressed her belief that his affections were given to her sister, and, what appeared to him even stranger, that Miriam's had been bestowed upon him. This latter circumstance seemed to him quite preposterous, even when he began, as impartially as his memory would let him, to review what had passed between Miriam and himself. Could he reproach himself with having done or said even one thing to show that he had singled out his cousin Miriam, beyond other cousins or other women? In point of fact, the vista of his recollections along the few weeks he had been at Northray, seemed already so interminable that he could hardly recall anything that had passed in its true colours.

The truth was, that Eric Ericssen had

already honestly forgotten, absorbed as he had lately been in the deep, pure, earnest passion that had been called up within him by, so it seemed to him, the nobler character of his cousin Ruth; he had honestly forgotten the very decided admiration he had begun by feeling for the lovely face and pretty manners of Miriam.

His cousin Miriam had a thousand of those small indefinable charms of voice and of manner, those innocent womanly wiles; those, so to say, skin-deep mental attractions, which are pretty sure to captivate the attention, if not the admiration, of most men at first going off, and which often come in a short time to fatigue them. A man, whether he likes or dislikes this sort of thing, is bound, in common decency and unless he desires to invest himself with the character of moodiness and a ridiculous misogyny, to respond to some extent by a certain interest of manner, and, perhaps, an occasional over-emphasis of agreement. He must needs take his part in this pleasant symphony, unless he wish to do violence to the laws of social harmony.

It was owing to the fact that Eric had acquitted himself so creditably in this not

disagreeable duo, had performed his second part in such true concord, that Ruth had been led to believe what she did, and that even Miriam had made herself happy in a similar delusion.

It was no fault of Eric's. Never for one moment had it occurred to him that he was taking in his cousin with a pretended interest in her ways and speeches; and very far less had it ever dawned upon him that Miriam had more than a cousinly friendship for him. That man is surely to be held utterly despicable who presumes to suppose that any woman whatever, under any circumstances whatever, can like him with more than friendly sympathy, until she has herself unmistakably given him so to understand. A young man possessed by such a conceit is at once put beyond the pale of human endurance; and Eric Ericssen, though half of foreign parentage, had more than an Englishman's diffidence on such points.

Having duly bewildered himself by recollections which were hindered of all exactness by the constant image of Ruth, which crossed and recrossed his memory at every point, but having on the whole, established it with him-

self that Ruth's strange notion about Miriam was altogether a hallucination, he proceeded to ask himself seriously what chance there was of his inspiring Ruth with any liking for him.

At this point of his meditations there suddenly occurred to him a reflection which, fortunately for his peace of mind, had not till that moment suggested itself to him. In her half unconscious state in the cave, Ruth had spoken his name. It was also the name of their Norwegian cousin; and her utterance of it was understood by old John Lang to refer to this Eric Sindal. Why should she have spoken this man's name, and why should so unobservant a person as the old boatman have put this particular interpretation upon her doing so, if it was not for one obvious circumstance, which it sent a sharp pang of pain through his heart to think of?

He was sitting in the sunshine on the stone bench by the pleached alley; and a breadth of green, mossy turf intervened between him and the porch. Over the porch was Ruth's room, the blinds still drawn down. He had sat there daily, where he could see her windows, knowing that she was now well

again, and wondering why he never saw her. Now the reason had come suddenly upon him. After the declaration he had made to her, and circumstanced as he supposed she was, to meet him again would, of course, have a particular strangeness and awkwardness for her.

He knew that their Norwegian cousin had stayed several weeks in the island the year before; he now remembered that he had heard some vague rumours of his intended return to Northray. This return would of course be connected with Ruth, if any understanding had taken place between him and her. Nothing, he was sure, short of an actual engagement between them would account for Eric Sindal's return so soon from so far.

At this moment Miriam appeared at the porch, and he proceeded to question her as to her cousin.

"I am rather curious about your cousin, Eric Sindal; what is he like?"

"He is very nice," said Miriam comprehensively.

"Tall or short, dark or fair, clever or stupid? Please tell me all about him."

"He is not so tall as you," she said; "in fact, he is not tall at all; he has fair moustaches

and blue eyes; he is very clever. There are answers to all your questions!"

"Is he——gentlemanlike?"

"Why, yes," said his cousin, "he is a count, you know—he is Count Sindal."

"Ah! Of course then he must be," said Eric, with a mockery that was quite new in him, and that Miriam again thought she understood.

"I suppose," said Eric, rather more slowly, "he must like his cousins very much to come so soon again to see them."

"Do you really want to know about that?" said Miriam.

Eric pretended that he did not, and went on to ask—

"He is coming to Northray, is he not?"

"Yes; perhaps next week;" and Eric's looks got so black that Miriam was delighted.

"What were you going to say just now about him?" he asked, with very transparent duplicity.

"I was only going to say," said Miriam, meaning it quite kindly, "that he has an immense admiration for——" she dwelt on her words and watched his face—"for Ruth."

"Ah! has he indeed?" said Eric, and his

expression straightway became inscrutable to her.

Ruth Ericssen could not hide herself for ever. One day she came out as they all were on the lawn. It was, Miriam conjectured, the shock to her nerves which made her steps falter, which made her hands tremble so much as she shook hands for the first time with her cousin; which made her fix her eyes on the ground as Eric spoke to her; which made her voice uncertain, like that of a timid school-child. It was very odd—thought Miriam—in Ruth, who had no nerves to speak of, whose voice usually had the clearness of a bell, and whom she had never yet known not to hold her eyes steadily and honestly on the face of the person she addressed.

Eric thought he could guess how it was. He would have liked to speak even one word alone with Ruth, but by design of hers or by accident, this could not be; her father or her sister was always by on the rare occasions during the next few days when Eric saw her. Her restraint towards him continued. It was so marked and so strange that Mr. Ericssen—though blind—observed it; and Miriam, herself blinded by her self-delusion, began to

notice that, while the relations between Eric and her sister had quite lost their cordiality, he had changed in his manner towards her too, and, when not absent and brooding, was short and almost abrupt of speech. It needed not the episode of Ruth and Count Sindal to make Miriam guess at the cause of these changes.

So did it come to be that the party at Northray were in an uncomfortable state, and that three members of it were more or less at cross-purposes with each other.

CHAPTER XII.

A NEW COMER.

THERE was at Northray a small trading cutter owned by the principal farmers and fishermen of the island, which carried the spare produce of the farms and the down of sea-birds to the south, and brought back the merchandise of more civilized countries. It was the pride of the islanders to have this little vessel in such trim and order as rich men love to keep their pleasure-yachts in; and it was the boast of the Northray men that no better sea-boat or swifter craft threaded the intricate channels of the Shetlands, and navigated the Northern and the Baltic seas—for the islanders found the best market for their chief product, the feathers of the eider-duck, in the German and Swedish harbours, and even among the Russian ports of the Baltic.

The cutter was now on her return voyage, and a daily look-out was kept for her from the highest point of Roora Head. She would touch at Christiania, in Norway, on her way to Northray; and Count Sindal had written to say that he would take passage in her for the islands.

One morning, word was brought that the cutter was in sight from Roora Head; and very soon the inhabitants—most of whom had some proprietary interest in the vessel—were watching to get the first glimpse of her from the lower-lying eminences behind the village. The minister, his daughters and his guest, went out to join the watchers. The wind was blowing from the island, as it was on the day when Eric had landed; and the cutter, close-hauled as the vessel which bore him had been, was approaching the harbour by similar zigzag tackings.

The resemblance between a sailing ship and a bird on the wing has never failed to strike the most unobservant. The indirect approach of the vessel to the shore, and her sudden stoppage when she arrived opposite the creek and pointed her bows to the wind as she hove to, and with her sails shaking to the breeze

remained quite stationary, seemed to those on shore singularly like the movements of some strong-winged bird of prey that, in ranging through the air, has caught sight of his quarry on the ground, and hangs fixed over the spot with shivering wings till he makes his swoop.

A dozen boats put off, and in one of them Count Sindal landed—a man so utterly unlike anything Eric had expected, that he could hardly refrain from laughing at his own jealous apprehensions.

Count Sindal had been knocking about in a small vessel in these tumbling northern seas for eight or nine days, and yet neither he nor his clothes were travel-stained or travel-worn. Eric Ericssen had the contempt which most Englishmen entertain for over-careful dress; and he noted with amusement the exquisite freshness of Count Sindal's appearance, his tight yellow kid gloves and his well-fitting clothes, with the gloss of the tailor's shop still upon them. He looked curiously, and not without some little contempt, at Count Sindal's somewhat mincing walk over the rough, stony beach, among the sunburnt, ungainly, hulking, jersey-clad fishermen, who were standing about in the high-shouldered

attitude assumed by seamen idling on dry land.

The young gentleman passed through their midst with delicate, affected steps, giving little good-humoured nods and smiles to the men he recognized; and they watched him as they might have done a being from another planet.

Count Sindal advanced towards the Manse party—a small fair-haired man of three or four and twenty, good-looking, with delicate features, somewhat round faced, with small upturned moustaches, a very assured manner, and a pleasant, good-natured smile, which did not often leave his face. He had fixed his eyeglass in his eye as he perceived his cousins in the distance; but as he came quite near them, he let it drop, and the little unintentional frown with which he had kept it in its place, and which had had an odd inconsistency with the constant smile on his lips, disappeared, and his whole face beamed and wreathed itself in the smile of recognition with which he greeted his cousins and their father.

With his thousand little affectations of speech and manner, Count Sindal was so unfeignedly good-humoured, so full of glib small-

alk, so unselfish and so courteous, that it was impossible not to like him. Eric himself, prepared for the gloomy antipathy towards him which is characteristic of the jealous lover, came under the charm, and won the Norwegian too by his own frankness and good-humour.

It was one point in Count Sindal's favour that he spoke French with an accent as bad and with a grammar as detestable as was compatible with extreme fluency. It was an advantage, because to the minister and his daughters, who spoke this language—which, on Count Sindal's arrival, became the common one of the whole party—with perfect correctness, and to Eric, who spoke it like a native, his eccentricities of grammar imparted a quaintness, a certain charm of originality to his talk, which was in other respects quite foreign to him. If we cannot succeed in not being intrinsically commonplace, it is good to have some superficial appearance of originality. Count Sindal had this advantage.

He was a great talker, and he had the talent, most rare and valuable in society, of interesting those who listened to him in what occupied his own thoughts, and had never

interested his hearers before. True, these matters were not of very deep or general importance, and perhaps, in strict social propriety, Count Sindal should not have intruded upon the quiet conclave in Northray such matters as the names of the singers at the Stockholm Opera-house and the quality of their voices, what ladies had given balls during the past winter, who was going to be married at the end of the season and who was not going to be ;—in short, all the gossip and all the mild scandal of society in the Swedish capital.

Count Sindal was deeply interested in all this, and he was so in earnest, so exact and so thoroughly intelligent in his treatment of all these topics, that he gave a positive consistence and importance to them, and brought his environments and their ways of life so vividly before the party at the Manse, that Ruth, Miriam and Eric Ericssen, and even the minister, got to talk of these people and their doings as of real men and women, whose voices and faces and manners they had heard and seen and observed all their lives.

The person who chiefly enjoyed this very small talk was, odd as it seemed to Miriam,

her sister Ruth. To Miriam herself it had indeed always appeared that the subjects of Count Sindal's conversation were delightful. She had liked, when her cousin was with them before, to have pictured to her so vividly a sort of life in which she knew she would delight, and was confident she could shine. Ruth, she remembered, had a little held back in her approbation. She had gone so far even as to speak of Count Sindal as frivolous, and to receive his narrations with some amount of banter; but this was on his first visit. Now she was very different. She listened attentively to every word he said, she asked serious questions, and no one could distinguish the faintest tone of irony in this seriousness.

This was, thought Miriam, a little inconsistent with what she was sure she had observed of Ruth and Eric Ericssen—or was it consistent with that of which she had once accused her sister? She had told Ruth that when she chose she could exercise some sort of fascination over people, and that she had chosen to use this power with Eric Sindal, and would, no doubt, do the same with Eric Ericssen. Miriam had been ashamed of this speech, uttered in her anger, almost as soon as she

SPLENDIDE MENDAX.

had made it, and yet she reflected, in the bitterness of her second disappointment, that such hasty speeches, so made, have often a grain of truth in them; and this one clearly more than a grain of truth, for had not Ruth succeeded in doing this very thing which she, Miriam, had foretold? Had she not won first Count Sindal from her, and now, notwithstanding her distinct promise to the contrary, Eric Ericssen too—while all the time she was not relinquishing her hold upon her Norwegian cousin?

If it had been any one but Ruth, she could have borne it; but from her, who always had been so ready to give evidence and make profession of sisterly love, Miriam felt it to be a peculiarly grievous wrong. Ruth was ready enough to make a hundred small sacrifices for her and to do innumerable favours and services which were really of no intrinsic importance, and now, the moment that a real proof of unselfishness was required of her, Ruth was found wanting. The injury was in itself hard enough to be borne, though, if it came to that, Miriam repudiated the idea of her feelings being at all seriously involved in respect of either of her cousins. It was not that

which pained her, but the disappointment she felt about Ruth—that Ruth, whose affection and true-heartedness she had always counted on so surely, should prove so weak and so false to what she herself and every one else had believed and said of her.

In point of fact, Miriam's reflections on this important matter led her to as near an approach to a true judgment as a young lady's meditations on such a matter are ever likely to reach to. Miriam, indeed, was not a person to break her heart for anybody; but such fortune as hers had been with her two lovers is enough to wring the very toughest heart; and there was certainly peculiar bitterness and a peculiar sting in the fact that her loss was her sister's gain—a sister who had until now yielded everything to her!

So Ruth Ericssen, in her own trial, got no help from Miriam—got no kind words or kind looks from her—and, so treated, had but the more excuse to betake herself to the quarter where she could be quite sure of perfect sympathy and perfect devotion.

CHAPTER XIII.

A FALSE WOMAN.

THINGS went on for a time very smoothly at Northray Manse; but it was a smoothness of the surface only, and Count Sindal, a superficial observer, guessed nothing at first of the twists and eddies of the social current. He was accustomed to an attentive and appreciative audience, and this he got at Northray, or thought that he got. It never struck him that all the actors in the little comedy except himself were too much engrossed with their own interests and feelings to care to take any part but that of apparently interested listeners.

At last some things began to strike him as strange. Formerly it was Miriam whom he remembered to have chiefly impressed; Ruth, as he recollected, never had cared for his

reminiscences of social existence at Stockholm; now it was Ruth, and this was a pleasing and flattering circumstance, inasmuch as he had long ago made up his mind that Ruth was the more attractive of his two cousins—not, perhaps, the prettiest, though even of that he was not quite sure—but decidedly the most interesting. Miriam, if anything, a little shunned him, but Ruth went rather the other way, and not seldom he and she found themselves together. Sometimes, if the party were by the seashore, on a boating expedition, or on the cliffs, he would find that it was he and Ruth who had detached themselves from the others, with no conscious effort on his part. This was flattering, and he was glad of it in other ways, for he had certainly at one time paid some rather marked attentions to Miriam, and it was pretty clear to his experience of such matters that Eric Ericssen and Miriam were on such terms as to obviate any difficulties on that head. So, being an essentially good-natured, easy-going person, Count Sindal was glad, on Miriam's account, as well as on his own.

One thing, indeed, did strike him as odd. When others were by, Ruth listened, was in-

terested, and asked pertinent questions, but when he and she wandered away from the others, as not seldom happened, and her interest in his conversation should clearly have redoubled, it rather than not flagged. Indeed, her absence of mind was so conspicuous upon one occasion, that he had to call upon her for some sort of an explanation. He had been running on as usual about the social life of Stockholm, and her eyes had been fixed so intently upon his face as he spoke that he was tempted to throw an almost tender tone into the inquiry, "How should you like this sort of life, Ruth?"

She did not answer, but stood still in the path and tried to remember or to guess at his question. He repeated it, and Ruth, recalled to a sense of the fact that her thoughts were wandering, entirely dashed the hopes she had unconsciously raised by answering abruptly—

"I should hate it!"

At this moment of confusion to both of them—to Ruth, in being found out in her inattention, and to Count Sindal in being disappointed of the favourable impression he had thought he was making—at this moment Eric Ericssen and Miriam overtook them.

The sudden pause, the earnest manner of both Ruth and Count Sindal and their evident confusion, led to a very obvious surmise on Eric's part. Ruth read his interpretation of the occurrence in his sudden paleness, and her heart beat fast at the thought that he had come to exactly the conclusion that she had been trying to bring him to. She looked at Miriam, and on her face, too, was an expression of the strongest disapprobation.

Count Sindal, good-natured as he was, was hurt; he thought, and not perhaps without cause, that Ruth was treating him rather cavalierly, and in the simplicity of his nature he punished her by directing his attentions to Miriam. So he walked forward with his youngest cousin, and as Eric and Ruth followed somewhat more slowly and in silence, they heard the rapid flow of his conversation.

"Ruth," said Eric Ericssen presently, "you have not forgotten what I said to you that day?"

Ruth did not speak for a moment.

"You know what I mean?" he said.

"Yes."

"You think, perhaps, because I have said

no word since, that I did not continue to mean what I said that day in the cave?"

No answer.

"Yes or no?"

Still she gave no answer: then he went on, "Look, Ruth, I do not wish to importune you or to seem rough to you, but you must answer me 'yes' or 'no.' Did you think I had changed my mind?"

She would willingly have answered evasively, but something compelled her to say No."

"I want you to be quite sure I have not altered." He was speaking to her in tones troubled a little by the strength of his emotion, but he mastered that as he went on, and his voice was strong and distinct. "If I had known then what I now know—I mean," he said, looking quickly along the beach line to where Count Sindal and his companion were walking, "I mean, if I had known about your cousin, perhaps I should not have spoken."

"Oh," said Ruth quickly, "do not think—" then she stopped, and he went on—

"I told you I loved you, Ruth, and though I now see it was useless to have told you, I do not draw back. I trust you with the

knowledge. I am glad that you should know it."

"Eric——" she began, and as they stood still for a moment, she looked for the first time for many days into his face. There was a look of loyalty and directness in Eric's eyes which went straight to her heart. It was a reflection of her own highest ideal. "He loves me," she whispered to her soul, "and I love him dearly. Can I ever bring myself to part from him—to break with this love?"

He slowly took in some part of the meaning underlying the eager, intent look on the girl's face, with its almost painfully wistful expression, and a ray of hope shot across his despair.

"Ruth," he said quickly, "tell me, for Heaven's sake, have I been wrong in supposing there was this obstacle?"

Was she to tell a lie? Surely not. Yet if she did not, she must admit there was no obstacle.

"Are you engaged to Eric Sindal?"

Now the trial had come, now the temptation was upon her! A deeper pallor came over her face. A sharp spasm seemed to cut

through her. She grew chill and she trembled; then she looked up boldly into his face.

“Eric, my dear cousin, I have promised to marry Count Sindal!”

CHAPTER XIV.

A LOST LOVE.

THE two young men came to something very like the same conclusion about their cousin Ruth. Eric Ericssen thought she should have let him know sooner of her relations with her Norwegian cousin, and perhaps, he thought, she should have used a little less hesitancy in her manner when she did make the revelation ; and Count Sindal was fully persuaded that she had wantonly encouraged him to commit himself to a serious and useless avowal of his affection. He was, as has been mentioned, not an ill-natured person, but he had his due share of pride, and his pride or his vanity had been wounded to the quick. Wounds in that region smart a good deal, and heal slowly. Sindal was not a little angry with his cousin, and what was worse, he was

disenchanted with her. He called her in his wrath by the names which he thought she richly merited. She was in his eyes heartless, a coquette and so forth; and the unoffending and by him rather ill-used Miriam began to acquire fresh charms in his estimation.

Eric Ericssen, on the other hand, was more patient of his injuries. He saw that Ruth was wrong, and yet he made excuses for her. He loved her no jot the less for letting him go on loving her when it was clearly her duty to have stopped him; but then Count Sindal's love for her was the summer day's dream of a boy, Eric's the absorbing passion of a man, and such a passion is a fire which transmutes all it touches to pure gold; and very soon it got to be no let at all to the intensity of his passion that he should see Ruth to be vain, or weak, or even disingenuous.

For Ruth herself things were more serious. The light of life was, she now thought, quite extinguished for her, and the savour till then in her surroundings was savour no longer. She was indignant with herself for having spoken an untruth of so portentous a kind, though she could not see even now how she could honourably and loyally to her sister have

escaped from telling it. She had taken an unpardonable liberty with the name of another person, and the time must come sooner or later when Eric Ericssen would know that what she had said had been a lie; and it never by any possibility could be known to him or even to Miriam herself, for whose sake she had encountered this great shame, what were its causes and what the excuses for it.

This thought was torture to her. She would never be able to prove to Eric that she had not been altogether base and unworthy. Not only must she give him up, but she must know that he despised her. She had made the great sacrifice, and now the reasons for which she made it began to seem insufficient. She was not, indeed, so ignoble as to want Miriam's gratitude, for she knew when she did this thing for her that her sister would never suspect that she had made any sacrifice at all, but she began to doubt Miriam's susceptibility of any serious suffering. If it had come to the worst, she reflected, Miriam, with her insensitive child's nature, could never have felt the pangs she was now enduring; and here Ruth was right, but she was wrong in believing that her own wound was a wound for ever,

or, as she fully believed, that her nature was hardened for all time; that her sympathies thenceforward for her fellow beings were to be dead—swallowed in the gulf of her ruined hopes. Many men and women under the overpowering burden of some such grief have thought as Ruth thought, and instances are unfortunately plenty enough of their having thought correctly—instances of disappointment souring the temper and utterly annihilating the sympathies, but this could not be with such a nature as Ruth Ericssen's.

It was through the keenness of her feelings and the strength of her character, its fortitude and its rectitude, that the blow had come upon her; and it was this strength and this keenness that would save her from the fate of lower natures. Ruth could never forego her sympathy with what was true and right. Her loyalty and her kindness would come back to her, though for the time these qualities should seem to her to be dead, in the death of her hopes and the utter ruin of the whole scheme of her life. Like the famous statue of the Egyptian god, wrought by some secret artifice to utter melodious sounds when the morning sunbeams fell upon it, and whose

shattered fragments are still responsive and vocal to the sun's rays, so there are natures so exquisitely formed and attempered that no ruin of their own lives has power to diminish their God-given faculty of sympathy with the joys and griefs of others.

I have till now encouraged my reader to indulge his natural levity at the young-lady enthusiasm of Ruth Ericssen, and we have together somewhat made merry over professions which promised to end in nothing, but now that they have been accomplished, now that the sacrifice has (after a very clumsy and awkward fashion indeed, but with perfect earnestness and intention of finality) been consummated—now, by heaven, we will laugh no longer. Ruth Ericssen is my heroine, and my story shall stand or fall with her. She shall not be laughed at.

CHAPTER XV.

TIME THE CONSOLER.

TIME, which cools enthusiasm, deadens joy and dulls grief, was not in the case of Ruth's wretchedness to work its slow and partial cure. The strain on her endurance had been too great, the effort of mental repression too strong for one like her just recovered from a violent physical shock. She fell ill—not suddenly, nor was it an illness marked by apparently dangerous symptoms. Hardly was it noticed at first by those about her that she had sickened, and not for a long time did they perceive that she was overtaken by a dangerous malady.

Miriam watched by her sister's bedside as she lay in the unquiet stupor of a low fever, insensible to outward impressions, yet her thoughts for ever busied, as in a dream, with

the uneasy iteration of delirious fancies. With a return upon her of her old affection Miriam began to ask herself if her harsh judgment upon Ruth had not been hasty. She had accused her sister of stealing from her the admiration of her first lover, and this, at least, she had come to know was not true, for Count Sindal had lately renewed his attentions to her so unmistakably as to deprive Miriam of any cause for bitterness against her sister on that ground.

It was as these not agreeable reflections passed through Miriam's mind, sitting by her sister as she lay fever-stricken, helpless and pitiable, that Miriam began to gather from Ruth's broken and unconscious utterances some revelation of her secret; a secret which nothing short of such communication would have enabled her to apprehend, for absolute incredulity is, as a rule, all which such natures as Miriam's can bring to bear on the developments of loftier and nobler ones than their own. A true, honest, tender and loving nature was Miriam's (all these virtues being in due subordination to good sense and a proper regard to self-interest), but nothing of a heroic one, and it is morally impossible for those who are

like her to comprehend or rise to the level of that which is so immeasurably above them.

Miriam, leaning her ear down to catch the murmured unintentional confidence, heard enough, however, to know how her sister was circumstanced. She caught for the first time in her life a sudden momentary perception of the hidden springs of action in Ruth which she had hitherto accepted as quite in the natural order of things; an insight which came upon her as 'the sudden enlightening flash which gives the wayfarer in the darkness a revelation of the firmament which he had forgotten was above him, and shows him also the mire and mud of the path he is travelling on. So Miriam, seeing at last what Ruth was, could measure her own littleness. A sudden revulsion of feeling took place within her.

She could only guess, indeed, that Ruth had sacrificed herself for her. She could guess that Ruth had rejected Eric Ericssen's love from the belief that it had been offered to herself; and Miriam was quite sure that she had done such violence to her feelings as had brought this illness upon her. Full of the pity and remorse which this knowledge brought

with it, she endeavoured to devise some mode of setting things right, but no possible means suggested itself. The secret she had surprised she could not reveal, even to Ruth herself.

Miriam came away from her sister's room with her eyes opened to a great deal that had seemed strange to her in the conduct of Eric Ericssen ; but she could still not understand how Ruth had so succeeded in dashing all his hopes as to bring him to the resolution which he had now formed, of leaving the island on the morrow.

Now that she had for a time forgotten her own interests in her newly-awakened pity for Ruth, and could therefore see with clearer eyes, she could read in Eric Ericssen's tones and face the loss of his hopes as fully as she had heard the story of Ruth's sorrow from her own lips.

"She is very ill indeed," said Miriam, to Eric Ericssen's often-repeated inquiries. She would have given the world to say a word to show that she guessed the story of his love, and would willingly help him. "To-day," she said, "the fever has left her, but she is weak. All night long," she went on, hoping that her cousin might ask a question, "all

night long she was unconscious, and she spoke to herself, so strangely and so eagerly."

"Perhaps she dreams of that day when our boat was lost?"

"No," said Miriam, "that recollection never seems to cross her mind."

Eric made no further suggestion, and Miriam, at her wits' end, said, "You could not guess what she spoke about?"

Eric Ericssen's face darkened, and after a moment he said, speaking low, "Of Count Sindal, I suppose."

"No," said Miriam, surprised; "why should she?"

And Eric answered shortly, "If she is engaged to marry him?"

"To —— marry —— Eric —— Sindal?"
Miriam's astonishment was profound.

"Surely it is no secret. She told it me herself," said Eric.

Miriam was now past expressing her surprise in words. She looked so long, and her look expressed such an intensity of amazement, that Eric was roused from his despondency.

Now, at last, Miriam knew what Ruth had dared to do in her devotion to her. She was first almost tempted to laugh, and presently

she burst into tears before the astonished Eric.

Then Miriam herself was carried by her new enthusiasm in her sister's cause to do a brave and, on the whole, a wise thing. She began from the beginning and, bold in the reflection that she was now the engaged wife of Count Sindal, she confessed,—though not without an intense repugnance and shame—the promise she had exacted from Ruth. She withheld, however, her suspicions, or, rather, her certain knowledge that Ruth responded to Eric's own feelings towards her. Leaving out this part of the story, she told everything.

“Can I not see her?” asked Eric.

Miriam hesitated.

“I must and I will see her,” he said, and he prevailed.

She led him to the sitting-room upstairs, where Ruth was lying upon a sofa. Eric had not seen her for a week. He had not expected to find her so changed. Her face had grown terribly thin, and it and her hands seemed almost diaphanous in the sunlight that filled the room. Her thick yellow hair lay loose upon her neck, and moving gently in the breeze from the window, seemed itself luminous, and

to melt into the golden sun-rays that fell among its ripples. She was wrapped from head to foot in a shawl of greenish material. The fever had not quite left her, but burnt in the bright flush upon her face, and flashed in the great, restless eyes that fixed themselves upon Eric as he entered the room.

He was for a moment almost awed by her appearance. He had not supposed she had been so ill. There was so tenuous and spiritualized a look upon her, a loveliness in his eyes so exquisite, so ethereal, so marvellous, that a sudden fear came upon him that she was slowly and surely passing away from her place among corporeal and earth-living beings.

"Ruth," said Miriam, smiling, "Eric has come to ask you why you told him you were engaged to Eric Sindal." The sick girl covered her face with her hands. "And I am come to tell you that Eric Sindal has to-day asked me to be his wife!"

The flush of colour which her hands had not wholly hidden left Ruth's cheek in a moment, and she looked inquiringly into Eric's face. Miriam walked to the door and left them together. Eric sat down by Ruth's

side: for several moments neither of them spoke.

"That was not true then, Ruth," he asked her presently, "what you told me?"

"No," she whispered.

"Not the least little bit in the world true? No foundation whatever?"

She looked quickly up into her lover's face, and this time she did not whisper.

"Not the least bit true," she said. "There was no foundation for it, Eric."

There was something in her eyes and in her voice that made him take her two hands in his as he had done once before. He kissed them as he had once before kissed them. Then in a moment they were clasped in each other's arms.

* * * * *

There is a popular saying that sudden joy kills. It is a popular delusion: it cures. At least in this case, Ruth Ericssen recovered from her illness with most astonishing rapidity.

END.

ON THE STAGE.

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ON THE STAGE.

From Miss Mary O'Brien, in Dublin, to Miss Ross, of Killballihone, County Clare.

“SURELY, dear Miss Ross, this is the grandest place in the world, and I don’t regret coming here now one bit. One thing, indeed, I want, to make me entirely contented and comfortable, and that is you, my dearest old friend, to talk to and tell of all my sayings and doings amongst these queer people.

“Now, where shall I begin? Shall I tell you all my troubles with my Aunt Macroom? How she said I shouldn’t go and demean myself with the play-acting people? ‘Oh! Miss Macroom,’ said I, ‘I don’t see that it’s demeaning myself at all to try to make my living like an honest woman, instead of hang-

ing on to relations who can hardly keep themselves.' 'Then, Molly O'Brien,' says my aunt, 'if you don't see it, I do, and others do besides me; for, sure, it's clear enough to every one that a young lady born and bred, an O'Brien of Lorn, has no business to be seen on the boards of a theatre, spouting and screaming like a madwoman, in spangles and glass jewels, and to get her name in the newspapers, maybe, with a bad tale tacked on to it.' 'Stop there, Miss Macroon, if you please,' I cried, very angry with her; 'no one has ever said a bad word of an O'Brien yet; and, please God, it shall not be me to give the first cause for that!'

"Oh! she was frightened, I can tell you, when I spoke up! 'Now, Molly dear, be easy,' she says. 'No one dreams you would do anything to bring the old name low; but these newspaper-men will tell a lie of any one to make a good story, or spite a person. My dear,' she said, coaxingly, 'you've too pretty a face to smear it with rouge and whiting. What, now, Molly darling, can't you get an honest living other ways than this? Why not go for a governess—you that can sing and play so sweetly, and speak French so well?'

'Yes,' I said, 'and be a dependent all my life long for poor wages, and get scant kindness from any one. No, thank you, Miss Mac-room.'

"They were all the same. I was to stay at home for the honour of the O'Briens, and wear their cast-off dresses, and eat their cold mutton, and be thankful; and be a poor relation obliged to be grateful for small favours, and be humble and useful all my life long—all for the honour of the O'Briens!

"So, at last, off I went; and when I got here, I called on the manager of the Theatre Royal. 'What!' he said, when he heard me tell the story of how my people would not have let me come; 'you—an O'Brien of Lorn—to come amongst us! Why, that won't do at all. What will all your folks be saying? They will just be tearing me to pieces for decoying you away!'

"'Sir,' I said, 'was it not yourself that first encouraged me to wish to go upon the stage?'

"'Oh, Lord!' said the manager, 'here's a pretty piece of work! Why, ma'am! why, my dear young lady,' he cried, getting up and walking up and down in his little room off the back

of the stage, 'when I saw you acting in those theatricals at your father's house at Castle Kill, sure enough I did say you were the only one, man or woman, of the whole lot, who was worthy to stand before the footlights. Yes ; I said—and I meant it too, in a way—that I would be willing to make a good engagement with you for the theatre here. It was a joke, ma'am ; a poor one enough, but a joke, anyhow, to say such a thing to Miss Mary O'Brien ; and I never thought you would take me at my word—a young lady like you ! Oh, dear me, no ! We could not think of such a thing, ma'am !'

" ' Well, now,' said I, ' and why not ? If I can earn my living at your theatre, why should I not ? If you won't have me here, sir, I must try elsewhere.'

" ' No, no !' said the old man ; ' we shan't allow that either. We shan't drive you away. But, come, now, Miss O'Brien, what will your friends be saying, when they hear you are an actress on the Dublin Theatre ?'

" So then I told him exactly how I stood since my dear father's death—how I was alone in the world, without brother, sister, father or mother ; that it was genteel beggary and de-

pendence on the one side, and on the other at least a decent livelihood and freedom, and possibly success in a noble profession.

“‘Ha! young lady,’ he said, ‘I see you know how to flatter an old actor who loves his calling! Yes, it is a noble profession for those who are fit for it—and that you *are* fit for it I am ready enough to believe. God bless my soul! Do you remember how you warmed them all up in that last act? I recollect I kept thinking to myself, Now the piece is gone asleep with all these lady and gentleman actors, who are no better than a bundle of sticks, the lot of them—and then you came on. I remember it all as if it was yesterday. Let me see! what was it? “The Princess of Treves.” Aye, and a wretched choice for a company of amateurs. There was one fellow pretty good, I remember. What was his name? Captain Doneraile—yes, that was it; and he appeared with you in that scene where he comes on as the Prince, with some atrocious nonsensical rant; and then you cut him short with—

“Those days are past.

I did mistake : and here I bring you back
The gifts which your once seeming love made rich.
That gone, their value’s gone ; and trust me, sir,

It was not by these gifts you won my heart ;
Nor think a true maid's faith and constancy
Are paid with such poor gems ! ”

“ ‘ There, you see, Miss O'Brien, I remember every word of it—and then, let me see, he says —

“ You wrong yourself.
It was not thus you won my love. That face
Was not the face wherewith you took my gifts.”

“ ‘ And then you come in again with—

“ And do you think, my Lord,
A woman's faith so faint, her heart so light ?
Can we forget our griefs as I your gifts ?
Have we no bitter thoughts when we are wronged ?
We have, my Lord ; and I will not forget.
The vengeance that I owe shall never tire.
You smile, my Lord ; but, by this hand you mock,
This hand shall work your ruin ! ”

“ ‘ Poor enough stuff it is ; but, heavens ! how you gave it—with what fire ! What life you put into this rant, and flashed your eyes on poor Captain Doneraile as if you could stab him ! I assure you, ma'am, in all my experience, I never saw high tragedy so fine as that bit of your acting. I have never forgotten it. You seemed to put your whole soul into every word you spoke. Why, now,’ he said, looking full at me, ‘ if I haven't frightened you talking so loud ! and you tired to

death, maybe, with travelling; and wishing me further with my spoutings and nonsense !'

" 'Oh ! it's nothing,' I said ; ' nothing to signify—only I am a little tired with the long ourney ; and then—it was foolish of me—you brought it all back in a moment. But I am all right again now. Now, Mr. Ball, will you take me, as you said you would ?'

" He reflected for a few moments. ' Well,' he said presently, ' if you must, you must. If you will be an actress, better begin here ; but I advise you to think well about it first. If you positively offer yourself for an engagement, I tell you frankly that, in the way of business, I shall have to accept you. I am manager only—not proprietor—and, acting for the advantage of the house, I should not be justified in turning talent like yours from the boards ; and now, too, we are a little short-handed. Let me see,' he said, taking down a book, and running his fingers up and down the pages ; ' this is how we stand :—*General Utility : Miss Bogle, married. Vacancy. Salary £2 10s.* That won't suit you. *Comic Soubrette and Peasant Girl, £2, without songs. Mrs. Johnstone ; promoted to Queens and general Heavy Business. £3 5s.* That won't

do, for it's filled; and the other won't do *because* it won't do. There, though, this may:—*Genteel Comedy*: £3 10s. *Range*: *Imogen to Lady Teazle, with songs. Miss Hamilton; indisposed, temporary.* There, now, I think that may suit?'

"'Suit me,' said I; 'perhaps it would if I knew what it all meant.'

"'What it means? Ah, yes, to be sure, you wouldn't know our names for things yet. *Genteel comedy* means genteel comedy parts, with a range of characters from Imogen, in Shakespeare's "Cymbeline," to Lady Teazle, in Sheridan's "School for Scandal;" £3 10s. means, of course, salary—three pounds ten a week. Miss Hamilton, you see, who undertakes these duties, is now indisposed, and we want some one to take her place. We begin in a month with the "Heir-at-Law." Come to-morrow at any hour you please. Let me hear you read one or two scenes;—or, stay, Miss O'Brien, here is a scene from "The Rivals"—please to learn it, and we will see what you make of it. We are neither of us bound for the present. Sleep upon it; think it well over; and if we are both pleased with each other to-morrow, we will sign an engagement.'

"Judy was waiting for me outside the theatre, and we went home to our lodgings. You heard, of course, that Judy O'Slane had gone with me. I had had to make up my mind to part with the girl, though I was sorry enough to have to do it, for she is the best and faithfullest creature in the world; but I said, 'Judy, my girl, I am going to try my fortune in the world, and we must part.' But leaving Judy behind was no easy matter.

"'Oh, mistress dear,' says Judy, 'is it parting from me you'd be thinking of, and I been with you since you was so high, and you never the hard word spoken to me all these blessed years? and is it for this I have dressed you, and nursed you, and tended you all these days? Oh! Miss O'Brien, darling, don't ye mind how it was I taught ye to dance the "Pride of Colooney," and to sing "Bruillengart" and the "Lament of Kinvarra," and now you'd be casting me off, mistress darling!'

"'Nonsense, Judy, don't you see it's only because I am too poor to afford a servant? I wish, indeed, Judy dear, I could take you.'

"'It's that, is it, Miss O'Brien?' says Judy, getting very red in the face and quite

angry with me; 'and is that a reason to be discharging your old servant? And who is to see to you, I would like to know, when you're living in Dublin and alone—and you ignorant as the year's old child, and every one cheating you right and left; and who's to nurse ye, I would ask, and you sick maybe? Oh, Miss O'Brien, I'm ashamed of you!' And Judy began to cry, and of course she got her way, and has come with me; and now I see she was quite in the right, for I could not have got on without her at all.

"When I got home I read the play, and learnt the scene Mr. Ball had given me; and now I have just finished my letter to you, and to-morrow you shall have another, that shall tell you whether I am engaged at the Theatre Royal, Dublin, with a chance of working honestly for my own bread, and being beholden to no one's charity. So, good-bye, dearest Miss Ross, and don't fret and worry yourself about your true and loving friend,

"MARY O'BRIEN."

From Miss Mary O'Brien to Miss Ross.

"This morning, I was walking up and down in my room, reciting the scene from the play,

and turning every now and then to Judy, who is sitting knitting in the window, to ask for her opinion; but Judy is not much of a critic, and all I can ever get from her is, 'Sure, now, that's elegant;' or, 'Trust you, Miss Molly, for handling the long words;' or, 'You'll bother them all, mistress darling, never fear!' But this is not what I require, of course, for I want some one to tell me of my mistakes.

"Judy has never been in a large town before, and she is delighted with everything; she keeps looking out of window, and telling me of all that takes place in the street. 'Oh, ma'am, here's an honest gentleman coming from over the way! Oh, ma'am, the honest gentleman's got a fall—he's muddied himself all over! Oh, ma'am, the honest gentleman's come to our door, and ringing the bell!' In a minute or two afterwards there was a step on the stairs and a knock at the room door, and the 'honest gentleman' himself came into the room.

"He told me his name was Brand, and he was stage-manager at the Theatre Royal—that is, he has to see after everything that goes on, drill the actors, overlook everybody, and keep everything straight: next to Mr.

Ball, he is the most important person on the theatre. He said that Mr. Ball had asked him to come to me, to see if he could be of any use, for that he might give me any information more comfortably to myself here than among a crowd of other actors and actresses.

"I said I was extremely obliged to Mr. Ball and to himself, and that if he would give me any hints I would do my best to profit by them.

"Mr. Brand is a little old man, with bright, deep-set eyes, a handsome face, marked all over with innumerable lines and wrinkles. He is old enough to have quite white hair, but he is a man of surprising energy and activity of mind and body. Whatever he does he seems to put his whole soul into. If it is only making a bow, he bows down to the very ground, and makes a great sweep in the air with his hat; if he sits down, he settles himself right down, and leans back in the chair, as if he was to be there for a month; when he gets up again, he bounds from it with a sudden start, as if he had seen a tiger. When he speaks, he suits his manner, and his action, and the tone of his voice, exactly to what he is saying, which has a most ludicrous effect,

and, in truth, always makes me inclined to laugh. He always seems to be acting—or rather over-acting—in private life; and when he has finished his own sentence he stops, frowns, pinches up his lips, and watches one's face as one answers, and he follows one's words as if his life depended upon catching them. When he is not speaking, he is always acting a sort of accompaniment in dumb show, which at first, I admit, put me entirely out of countenance. However, he is a good-natured man, and is liked in the theatre, though the actors are all more or less afraid of him.

“Mr. Brand, notwithstanding his English name, is an Italian by birth, and though he has a slight foreign accent, speaks better English than any one connected with the theatre. He knows our literature, particularly our playhouse literature, thoroughly, and his tastes and opinions are looked up to by every one. Behind his back he is familiarly known as ‘the Count,’ and it is said that he has a claim to that title; but no one has ever yet ventured so to address him. Notwithstanding his curious excitable ways, I can see that he is a gentleman in feeling as well as in manners.

“ ‘Now let me hear you your lesson,’ said Mr. Brand. ‘Have you a quick study?’

“ ‘Do I learn fast?’

“ ‘Yes, that is how we stage people phrase it.’

“ ‘I think I know the scene by heart now. It is important to learn fast, I suppose?’

“ ‘It is the most useless and the most cried-up qualification of an actor. Give me the actor who can understand the author’s meaning, and feels his part, and it matters not if it takes him an hour to learn each word.’

“ ‘Then he glanced over the scene. ‘Oh! Ball has given you this to learn—very well—very proper of him, indeed. If you can do this you can do anything. This is just one of those scenes where a mere ranter is off his guard. Now to begin’—and he tossed the book on one side. ‘The scene is where Miss Lydia Languish, having discovered that Captain Absolute and Ensign Beverley are one and the same person, finds that all the sentiment and romance which she had promised herself have disappeared. Lydia is “discovered,” according to the stage directions, sitting sullenly in her chair.’ Mr. Brand placed me in a chair, and asked me to con-

sider the window as representing the foot-lights. Then, suddenly changing his own gait and manner in a most wonderful way, he stood still and watched me for a moment ; then speaking in a low, reflective, most natural tone, in the character of Captain Absolute, he began the speech which opens the scene with the 'aside'—'So much thought bodes me no good.' He seemed to know the part as well as I did, and it went, as I thought, swimmingly. When it was over he relapsed into his own energetic manner.

"'Excellent,' he said; 'I never saw the part so comprehended; if it had been Mrs. Abington herself, who first acted Lydia Languish, and got Sheridan's own instructions, you could not have entered better into the author's ideas. Lydia is a complicated character, sentimental and romantic, but with strong feeling under it. Most actresses either exaggerate the sentiment and make it sickly, or over-do the feeling and lose all the fun.' Then he gave specimens, delightfully amusing, of both extremes; 'but you,' he went on, 'can give the light and shade of the part. You are magnificent, Miss O'Brien,' he said, with a half-mock bow. 'Ah,' he exclaimed,

‘this is what it is to have been born a lady! All the little *finesses* which come unconsciously to you, how are our poor girls to guess them? But hush,’ laying his finger on his lips with a smile, ‘we must forget all this! Now, if you will take the book and read Captain Absolute’s part, I will take Lydia. I shall follow your own reading closely, for I can’t better it, only throwing in a little stage business, which your experience has not taught you.’ Thereupon he sat in the chair, and, while I read Captain Absolute’s part, he acted Lydia, stopping to show me all the hundred little artifices for enhancing effect and giving point, which it would take years to discover for one’s self.

“For two hours he continued his lesson, most kindly and most patiently, going over and over again, till I began to see how much unsuspected art lies in good acting, and how to be perfectly natural and unaffected is itself only attained through an artificial training. It was most interesting. He kept back nothing from me of the secrets of his profession, and went on all the time interspersing advice, criticism, and flattery with the most wonderful volubility.

“‘Ah!’ he said, stopping suddenly, ‘now

you see how I can teach when I have a good pupil; will you see me at work on unpromising ones? I am going to show the company how they should act in the new piece. We bring it out next week. All the parts are filled, all the songs and speeches are learnt. Now, you shall have an opportunity of seeing human nature from one of its most ridiculous points of view, with all its stupidity, and prejudices, and envies, and jealousies at work undisguised. Do you want to know the world, Miss O'Brien? There is no better place to make its acquaintance than a greenroom, and no such opportunity as a rehearsal. Do you want to know what has turned my hair so white? Come and see me give my lesson to the company; and it will be an opportunity too of learning something of your fellow actors.'

"So he ran on, in his quick, excitable way, as we crossed the streets on our way together to the theatre. 'Stop!' said he, 'one thing—have you thought of a name?'

" 'A name?'

" 'Yes, a *nom de théâtre*—something romantic; something that will look well in a play-bill!'

" 'This had not occurred to me, but I was

glad not to have to see my own name before the public, and I asked him to suggest a new one to me.

“ ‘Let me see! you will not like a *very* grand one, like Miss Biddy O'Toole, whom you shall see presently, who would not be satisfied with anything less than “Augusta Montmorency.” Will Lovelace suit you? “Catherine Lovelace”—a pretty name, a little stagey, but not very magnificent. Will that suit you, Miss O'Brien—say, “Kate Lovelace”?’ ”

“I agreed to drop Mary O'Brien in favour of Kate Lovelace, and by the time we had settled this important matter we had reached the stage-door. A great wrangle of voices had warned me that the company was already assembled.

“ ‘There they are,’ said my companion, ‘all fighting over their parts! Now they'll be quiet for five minutes, to examine you, and then begin again.’ ”

“A sudden silence fell upon the assembly of ten or twelve ladies and gentleman as we entered.

“ ‘Mrs. Templemore,’ said Mr. Brand, with ceremonious gravity, ‘let me present you to

Miss Catherine Lovelace. Mrs. Templemore,' he said, turning to me, 'kindly undertakes to represent the queens of tragedy upon these humble boards; herself a worthy successor of Siddons and of Pritchard.'

"Mrs. Templemore swept me a curtsy which it only required the robes of a Roxalana to make majestic. She accepted the absurd compliment of the stage-manager in grave earnest, though I noticed that all the others were pinching their lips to avoid laughing.

" 'Miss Montmorency, I desire you to be acquainted with Miss Lovelace,' he said, turning to the pretty young lady *née* Bridget O'Toole, who takes the part of *soubrettes* on the Dublin Theatre; 'Miss Montmorency,' he said, with a profound bow, 'condescends to link an honoured name with such rôles as Madge, and Prue, and Patty.'

"Miss Montmorency looked delighted, and made her best curtsy. I should have been more impressed with her dignity but for the young lady's singularly rich brogue, when she said, with a broad smile, 'Sure I'm pleased to know ye, ma'am.' I could not resist this. I am too true an Irishwoman not to be taken by the real brogue, and Miss O'Toole and I shook

hands quite cordially. I think that I shall like her; she has a pleasant face, with good promise of fun in it.

"A very affected gentleman, with a round, pasty face, curling black hair, and a small, well-waxed moustache, now came up and begged to be introduced.

" 'Mr. Julius Ochterlony,' said Mr. Brand, with the same sententious manner, 'walking gentleman, hero, and lover;' then in a very audible aside to me, while the actor was making his bow and muttering some complimentary remark, 'Mr. Ochterlony of Castle Trumpet, extraordinary merit, and a real gentleman!'

"Mr. Brand went one by one through the company, introducing each with a mock compliment, of which every one in the room but the person to whom it was addressed saw the utter absurdity. I noticed that every single one of them could receive the most outrageous puff of his talent without suspecting its sincerity; and that, next to their theatrical merits, they liked best to be praised for their manners and high birth. The only exception was Mr. Barney Miles, the low comedian, who, being the son of a hairdresser in the town,

could not well be complimented on his connections. He joked all the others unmercifully on their pretensions to high birth, but he was very willing to accept a double dose of flattery on account of his artistic merit.

“‘Now, ladies and gentleman,’ said Mr. Brand, suddenly resuming his sharp, quick manner, ‘we are losing time; Miss Montmorency, oblige us by coming on in the first scene of “The Maiden of Mexico.”’

“It was a melodrama of the true modern type, with highly emotional passages and overwrought sentiment, tempered by scenes of broad farce.

“Miss Montmorency came forward with another actress as servants, and they began to drawl listlessly through their parts, contenting themselves with changing their positions as the stage directions required, and speaking without animation and entirely out of character.

“‘This won’t do, young ladies. Do you want to send the audience to sleep before they have heard the piece out? Pray leave that to the author.’

“‘Oh!’ said Miss Montmorency, ‘don’t be bothering us for nothing, Mr. Brand;

when the piece is played then you shall see !’

“ ‘ When the piece is played—when the piece is played ! Always the same story ; and when the curtain draws up there is nothing at all to see ! ’

“ By dint of scolding, and joking, and reasoning, and persuading, he got the two girls to exert themselves, and the scene passed off tolerably well. The same thing occurred with the next scene, and with almost every other. The actors were always wishing to act listlessly, that their false rendering might escape the lynx eyes of the stage-manager, always with the excuse that they would exert themselves when the audience was present. The same plea was always urged, ‘ Don’t put yourself out, Mr. Brand ; it will be all right when there’s an audience.’

“ ‘ That’s right, gentlemen, put it off till the audience is there, and when the curtain draws up what does it discover ? a couple of incapable sticks on the stage ! ’

“ In the serious part, Mrs. Templemore came on with a long soliloquy, which she disclaimed with considerable emphasis.

“ ‘ May I inquire, madam, why you keep on

swinging your arms backwards and forwards like that?’

“‘I thought, sir,’ said Mrs. Templemore, not without some little diffidence, ‘that the action might be suggestive might not be altogether unsuited, sir, to the despondency in which the character I represent is thrown.’

“‘Pray, madam, did you ever see, or hear, or read of a despondent person swinging his arms like a pendulum?’

“‘I really thought, sir,’ said Mrs. Templemore, deprecatingly, ‘that, under the influence of a strong emotion, it might be permissible to—give a certain pendulous motion to the arms—thus.’

“‘Good heavens, ma’am!’ said the impatient stage-manager, ‘keep them quiet, or the audience will wish to see you under the influence of a strong strait-waistcoat!’”

*From Miss Ross, of Killballihone, to
Miss Mary O'Brien.*

“I should have laughed over your letters, Molly dearest, if I was not a good deal nearer to crying about it all. Is it too late to change your purpose even now? Can you not, even

at the last moment, throw up your engagement and come down to us here? Oh, Molly, why did you go at all, and not let me hear about it first? maybe, I could have told you something that would have kept you at home. Did you reflect that if once you went on the stage, if only once you trod the boards of a public theatre, never afterwards could you hold up your head in County Clare? You know what their pride is here, and what they'd say about play-acting people, and all that. Do think it over seriously, my dear girl, make a sudden resolution for your good, and come down to us with Judy.

"To tell the honest truth to you, I did not half believe in your reasons for going to Dublin. Come now, Molly, don't be cross with me, but say it I must. You know we old people have nothing to do but sit still and use our eyes and ears. We can't help knowing some things, and we can't help talking about them. I know why you went, as well as if you had told me; and if I do not say what it is that I know, it is not to make you take offence and scold me for it. So that is what comes, Molly, of young ladies having a high spirit and quick tempers, that their best

friends daren't for the life of them tell them the truth.

"One day after you went, Captain Doneraile called to see me. I can assure you the poor man was in a very disturbed state of mind. He begged and entreated me a hundred times over to tell him where you had gone, why you had gone, and what you had gone to do. Of course I did not satisfy him, after what you had said to me, and having the fear of your anger before my eyes. Then he told me a long story about some misunderstanding you and he had had, and how you had listened to some report about him, and how that report was entirely and absolutely false and ridiculous, and how the proof that it was false was this, that—but here I stopped him, for it could be of no earthly consequence to me whether any story about Captain Doneraile was true or false, as you and he are no longer friends, and as you said to me, the last time you saw me, you wished you might never set eyes on him more in this world; but he seemed very anxious to persuade me, coming back again and again to what he called his proof, till at last he almost broke down my patience, and he did actually get some way

into his story, and was telling how it was that a certain Mrs. but you will be saying, Molly, what a talkative, troublesome old woman this is, to be bothering one always with some stupid gossip when she should be talking sense!

"However, I managed to interrupt Captain Doneraile again just in time not to hear him out; and every time he began I found something to stop his mouth with, till in the end I thought he would have lost his temper. 'Miss Ross! Miss Ross!' he called out at last, 'do for Heaven's sake let me edge in one little word, which it is most important you should know. Will you hear me finish one single sentence, ma'am, and send one single message from me to Miss O'Brien?' 'How can I promise to send messages from young gentlemen to young ladies, before I know what they are; and how can I know what they are, if you sit there afraid to open your mouth, just for all the world like a statue of the god of silence?'

"The Captain laughed, and indeed it was rather hard upon him, who had been trying to get a word in for the last half-hour. At last I did consent to let him tell his story and give

me his message ; but when he told his story I laughed at it, and when I heard his message I scolded him for venturing to ask me to be the bearer of such an impertinent one ! Tell a young lady, indeed, that . . . there, Molly ! you see I was just going to be indiscreet again, only I remembered in time not to bother you with his nonsense. However, I *was* indiscreet after all, and I hardly know how to excuse myself to you for what I have done, or if ever you will forgive me. What do you think that wheedling Captain Doneraile did ? My dear, what a handsome creature it is, to be sure, with a tongue that would charm a wild bird off its nest, I do really believe ! He coaxed me to tell him where you were gone, and what you were doing in Dublin. What will you say to me for that ? Really, now, I hardly like to think. I'm so terrified !

“As soon as I told him, he snatched his hat off the table, seized my hand in his, as if it was his sword hilt he'd got hold of and was going to cut his enemy's head off with it. ‘Thank you, dear Miss Ross,’ he cried, crushing all my fingers together in a jelly, I believe you are the very best woman in the world,’ and was out of the room in a minute. I

only hope he may not be on his way to Dublin at this moment!

"I am, dear Molly,

"Always your affectionate friend,

"LETTIE ROSS.

"P.S. I never could keep a secret in my life, so I must tell you, after all, what Captain Doneraile's story is, though for my life I can't see what concern it can have for you, or why he should wish so much you should know it. It is only that his cousin, the rich Mrs. Crawford of Crawfordstown, is going to be married to Lord Lintore. She has been engaged to him for three years. It appears that Captain Doneraile's own name had been connected with the lady's, but this, he says, is unfounded. I am a stupid old woman, my dear, and see nothing interesting in this story; but you are young and clever, and perhaps you do."

*From Miss Mary O'Brien, at Dublin,
to Miss Ross, of Killballihone.*

"What can I ever in all my life do to thank you enough, and be grateful enough, my darling Miss Ross, for your dear, good, kind letter? When I read it I kept forgetting I was in a

bare, untidy lodging in Dublin, and fancying I was listening to you, sitting in your pretty little drawing-room at Killballihone, with the row of old china teacups on the mantelpiece, and the bright fireplace, and that old worsted-work parrot on the fire-screen, with the great black beads for eyes; and, do you know, I heartily wished I was back there, looking at your friendly face, with all the fun in your eyes, and listening to your pleasant voice!

"Now, I will tell you what has been happening with me here since I wrote before. The manager and Mr. Brand have taken incessant trouble with my theatrical education, and one day Mr. Brand informed me that he had taught me all he knew, and that so far as the part of Lydia in 'The Rivals' was concerned, I was, he was pleased to say, perfect. It appears that the piece is a very favourite one with the Dublin audiences, and they have only not had it lately because they had no actress to take the chief female part, and now they have got me they have at once put the play in rehearsal.

"These rehearsals are dreadful things. You know what fun they always are in private theatricals—how all the blunders and makeshifts

and unpunctuality, and forgetting of one's part, or one's sceptre, or dagger, or poison-bowl—how all these things only amuse one the more; but on the real stage all this is stern business. If professional actors are a moment late they are heavily fined; if they forget their parts they are stormed at by the stage-manager, for it only delays the rehearsal, and keeps every one longer at work. When ridiculous blunders are made the company sneers, but nobody laughs. Every one, except the stage-manager who is in a perpetual state of storming at every one, is always either dull or listless, or out of temper and captious and rude.

“All this, however, is nothing, and I should not mind it much. What is hard to bear is the undisguised envy of every actor at the smallest superiority in another. As soon as the company had convinced themselves that I possessed some sort of talent, and had entered into serious competition with themselves, they began to give evidence of their feeling towards me. Mrs. Templemore, who does the parts of tragedy queens and heavy, serious characters generally, seemed to think herself particularly aggrieved by my pretensions: she would sweep by me with an angry scowl and without conde-

scending to speak a word. As I passed by groups of actors and actresses, I heard disparaging remarks about myself. Only the good-natured and voluble Miss O'Toole remains my friend, but she does me no acceptable service in repeating to me all the ill-natured things said by the others, beginning, 'Oh, Miss Lovelace, dear! isn't it a burning shame what that old Templemore says of ye?' . . . or, 'What do ye think, Miss Catherine, darling, they've invented of ye now?' One day, an old actor, under the guise of honest, friendly advice, warned me that a strong expression of public feeling would be made against me the first night, on the ground of my being a rich lady taking the place and eating the bread of poor, hard-working people, 'and could I really,' he asked, 'reconcile it to my conscience to do so, to take advantage of my rich breeding and expensive education, and show off my acquirements and my manners against those who had to struggle on with none of my advantages?' These are only a few of the disagreeables I have to submit to, and not all the kindness of the manager and Mr. Brand can make up for them.

"Well, it went on. The rehearsals had

come to an end, our dresses were ready, the scenes for the new pieces had been got out and furbished up. The city was placarded with announcements of the new actress who was to make her *début* in the favourite play; cunningly worded paragraphs had been inserted in the newspapers, hinting vaguely at the marvellous beauty and talent of *Miss Catherine Lovelace*, and a very considerable amount of interest and curiosity had been aroused. Every place in the house had been taken a week before.

“The afternoon of the day on which I was to appear had worn slowly away; I never knew time so long in passing. I was perfect in my part, had no fear that I should break down, and was prepared for the evening in every way; yet I was nervous and wretched. I had got your letter that morning. I was asking myself all day whether I was not engaged in a most rash enterprise. I seemed to be drifting towards what would separate me for ever from all my former life. All my first enthusiasm about success and stage triumphs had died away. I felt that after that night I might or might not be a famous actress, but I could never again be the Mary O’Brien

whom my friends had known. Then, too, I was beginning to see that I had been hasty in coming to the conclusion which I will admit was what had chiefly led to my leaving home; you know what I mean. I thought I had been trifled with and cruelly insulted. It had made me feel almost mad; and then I had taken the resolution to break entirely with my past life. Now I felt as when, in some dream, one is sliding down, slowly and helplessly, towards a precipice. I felt that with my own hand I was raising an obstacle which would separate me for good from what could make my only happiness. I would have given the world to have retreated, or to have woke up and found my engagement and my acting, and all connected with it, a bad dream.

“Five o’clock came. In an hour the doors of the theatre would be opened; in another, the house would begin to fill. I had begged Mr. Brand to let me sit in his own room, that I might be spared the disagreeable remarks of the other actresses. I was alone. I thought a great deal more of your letter than of my part. The words, ‘*Too late! too late!*’ those wretched, hopeless words, seemed every

minute ringing in my ears. I was restless, and, walking up and down, I caught, every now and then, a reflection of my figure in the tall pier-glass that nearly filled one side of the room. Dressed for my part in a stiff flowered and brocaded silk, with patches, my hair powdered and drawn back from my face, long gloves reaching half-way to the elbow, and all the old-fashioned peculiarities of the dress of the time, I seemed to myself to be utterly changed in appearance as well as in feelings, and to be actually taking leave of my old self. I had delayed putting on rouge, though I should presently have to do it, from some unaccountable repulsion to this last disguise of myself and badge of my new profession, and my face had a sad, haggard look not at all suitable to a '*light comedy* lady.'

"The noise of preparation, the shuffling of feet, the knocking of hammers, and the pushing of 'scenes' and 'flies' along their slides, and the humming sound of impatient and remonstrant and angry voices came deadened and confused to my ears. Suddenly there was a cessation of all sound for an instant; then my own name, interrogatively spoken, reached me. It was repeated by several voices in the

same tone. I reflected that only my assumed name was known, and that my real name was too common for the inquiry to relate to me; but I was mistaken. Steps came along the passage, and Mr. Brand entered. A friend of mine, he said, desired to see me at once; and before he could say a word more, Captain Doneraile himself was in the room. Mr. Brand shut the door and walked away.

“Dear Miss Ross, that short moment was, I think, the bitterest I have yet lived! To be seen in that place, in that wretched dress, and to think that in one short hour I should have to go through all the abominable mummeries of the stage before the eyes of Captain Doneraile himself; to be seen in that disguise by the man whom, as you truly guessed, I have loved with all my heart! I could not bear up against the shame and the humiliation. What do you think I did? You, who have no faith in hysterics or fainting fits, will hardly believe that I, who used to think as you do about such things, actually went into a faint myself! I have quite compromised myself in your eyes. I did not faint right off, I believe, but the room seemed to turn round, the light faded from my eyes. I should

have fallen if Captain Doneraile had not held me, and just as he came up, I caught one glance of myself in the glass, with a white face and outstretched hands. 'He will think it a stage trick!' I thought to myself, as the darkness round me grew thicker. Then he laid me down gently upon the sofa, and in a moment I had begun to recover consciousness, and saw Captain Doneraile's alarmed face over me. Then I made a huge effort and recovered almost entirely, and told him it was nothing, and I was well again.

"The first thing he asked me was if you had written to me. I said 'Yes.' 'And told me what he had said?' 'Something of it,' I said. 'Did she give you my message?' he asked. 'No, she did not, but she said you asked her to.' So then Captain Doneraile gave it me himself; and as you know what it is, I need not repeat it.

"This is very nearly all I have to tell. Of course we have made up our quarrel; indeed, everything having been cleared up, I have nothing to quarrel about for the present.

"There were great remonstrances when Captain Doneraile announced that I should not be able to act, and should break my

engagement altogether. The poor manager was in despair, but Captain Doneraile succeeded at last in completely satisfying him—not, I am afraid, for nothing.

“As I got into the carriage that drove me from the theatre, still in my stage costume, but wrapped from head to foot in a long cloak, I cast a last look at the pit entrance of the theatre. The doors would be opened to admit the public in a few minutes. A great piece of paper had been nailed against them, and on it was written, in very large letters, and with the ink still wet—

“‘*On account of the sudden and alarming indisposition of Miss Catherine Lovelace, the play of “The Rivals” is unavoidably postponed.*’

“So, after all, you see, I never really went ‘*On the Stage.*’”

END OF VOL. I.

32





